Humour, Rhetoric and Racism

A Sociological Critique of Racist Humour

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Abstract

This thesis is a sociological examination of racist humour that uses a) linguistic models of humour to highlight how the mechanisms of humour work rhetorically, and b) the sociological theories of Zygmunt Bauman on the characteristics of order-building discourse in modernity and postmodernity. These ideas are applied to four specific modes or case studies of racist humour to show how it impacts on modern and postmodern discourse. In my first case study, embodied racist humour, a derivative of biological racism, is identified as a racism primarily aimed at black people in the US context, by expressing racist dichotomies and images of the removal of the black 'other'. Second, culturally racist humour is shown to have a similar impact on racism aimed at British Asians. Third, the humour of black and Asian comics is examined as a key site of resistance to embodied and cultural racism, but one that is fraught with problems associated with the rearticulation of racism. Lastly, in the postmodern period, liquid racism is highlighted as an increasingly confused and diluted type.

Throughout the thesis, racist humour is shown to have a series of interconnected roles in supporting the meaning systems of racism. Overall, the thesis provides a means of analysing racist humour, and in so doing moves sociological humour studies beyond accounts that fail to negotiate the particular semantic frame and functions of racist humour.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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Introduction

> I think humourless books about humour are a bad idea; some would say, of course, that all books about humour are a bad idea. (Arthur Asa Berger, 1995a: 3)

Popular Sentiments

Many in contemporary society would agree with Arthur Asa Berger's sentiment. Humour, it is assumed, is usually a good thing, the analysis of it is either unnecessary, or, worse than that, politically correct. This thesis argues against this sentiment. It is hoped that the thesis is, as far as any text can be, humourless for the reader, and it is implicitly and explicitly asserted throughout that the sober or serious study of humour is far more important for sociology than has been recognised to date, that there are serious implications and effects created by joking and these require sociological investigation.

With this in mind, the thesis examines the ways in which racist humour acts as racist rhetoric, has a communicative impact, is persuasive, and can affect impressions of truth and ambivalence. Therefore, the aim of the thesis is to explain what racist humour does vis-à-vis serious racism, and to provide a sociological critique of racist humour on that basis. Of course, the exact details of what I mean by a connection between humour and rhetoric will be explained early in Chapter One. What I would like to explain now is what I mean by 'sociological critique'.

Turning first to the notion of critique in humour studies, some have attempted to map the ethical limits of humour. For example, de Sousa (1987) attempts an ethical discussion of when it is wrong to laugh, and Lockyer and Pickering (2005a) present a collection of articles that map the line between the aesthetic appreciation and ethical evaluation of humour. Along these lines, this thesis follows recent examples that argue, 'there are times when humour, or attempted humour, is not only inappropriate but also disastrous for the various social identities and relations that are drawn into it' (ibid: 1). It also seeks to understand 'how humour at once permits, legitimates and exonerates an insult' (ibid: 12). While the project is concerned with offensiveness, this is not the sole focus. I am also concerned with non-offence where offence might be expected and vice versa. The thesis seeks to clarify the grounds for ethical criticism through establishing a particular form of sociological critique.

The type of sociological critique developed in this thesis, in relation to racist humour, is one that examines the linguistic structures and mechanisms of the particular discursive form. It is an explanation of what racist humour does and how it does it. The thesis does not argue for the censorship of racist humour, rather it shows how racist humour works, how it generates its meaning, and outlines the typology or repertoire of dominant forms in order to establish the role of humour in racism generally. This is achieved by mapping the specific socio-linguistic rhetorical readings that can be created by various types of racist humour, and how these types of humour reflect and refract wider social and/or discursive trends. It is at this point that the thesis becomes specifically sociological. I critically employ the theoretical repertoire of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman for this effect, specifically his thesis of modernity and postmodernity, his ideas on liquid modernity, and the occurrence of ambivalence in each of these social forms. By deploying Bauman's theoretical repertoire, I show that as far as racism takes on the characteristics of each of the social forms in which it emerges, racist humour can have a rhetorical impact on the truth claims and ambivalence produced in each. Bauman is especially important for the argument because he explains the occurrence of ambivalence and ambiguity in belief and language, an occurrence that provides the material for the formation of humour.

Problems of Studying Humour

> The essential problem, I suggest, in talking seriously about humour is that humorous and serious discourse operate according to fundamentally different principles. (Mulkay, 1988: 5)

There are a number of 'problems' associated with studying humour, most of which relate to humour being a specific type of linguistic 'frame' or 'discourse'. Mulkay's comment highlights this. How can one seriously evaluate humour? It is *not* political discourse, it is *not* serious commentary, it *is* humour. I do not argue that humour functions in a singular way, that its readings are always of a particular type because they are humorous. However, I will argue that humour and joking structurally employs rhetorical devices, which implies that while humour may not *be* serious discourse, it can have a range of serious effects which are specifically heightened by the structural 'rules' and differences of the comic. As Mulkay says on this, 'it is precisely the symbolic separation from the realm of serious action that enables social actors to use humour for serious purposes' (1988: 1). This suggests that humorous utterances can generate more than one type of meaning - as serious or humorous. The thesis, therefore,

also has a concern with the polysemic, as the deflation of most protestations at racist and other types of humour usually originate from the idea that the language used is not offensive because it is not serious, that it exists in a different realm of meaning. Such accounts do not acknowledge the connections that are made in this thesis.

Henri Bergson described this inherent polysemia in humour as relating to its mechanism, to the incongruity that all humour creates, when a word 'belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time' (Bergson cited in Speier, 1998: 1363). The differences between humour and other types of discourse begin at this point, at what might be called the point of 'slippage' or incongruity. This observation has implications that multiply throughout the thesis, but which remain centred on the idea of polysemia. The overall implication of this structural characteristic is that an instance of racist humour, while we may witness it as a form of social control, can never simply be described as social control. The polysemia that humour develops when creating its meaning is a process that is socially out of control, something that aggravates the unexpected.

A second problem for the study of humour that needs to be tackled is the problem of functionalism, or more accurately, the problem of humour as multifunctional. While the study of humour is often functionalist, in that it looks for what humour does, for its serious effects, this need not mean recreating the problems associated with structural-functionalism. All significant accounts of humour are functionalist accounts, from Bergson's description of humour as a form of social discipline, to Freud's notion that it acts to express the unconscious. None of these thinkers argue that jokes are 'just jokes'. This thesis does not reproduce structural-functionalist metaphors of biological organisms, or its conservatism. There is no defence of functional relationships, which are presented so as to be critiqued. It is, therefore, a form of critical discursive functional mapping that describes functionality in a non-positive format. Many have argued that humour is both important and unimportant. This thesis seeks to firmly establish the functional importance of humour, not just as an aesthetic phenomenon, as one that is pleasurable or positive, but as one that has a marked and significant functional effect on serious discourse that is often detrimental in terms of its expression and support of racism. This is not contradictory because, like most social phenomena, humour is multifaceted.

With these two issues in mind, the idea of humour as a particular frame and the possible functional effects of that frame, I now examine other attempts at critique and signal where they diverge from this thesis. Overall, it is clear that the critical analysis of racist humour is a topic in need of some development.

Some argue that it is important to consider ethnic humour as a conflict device (Burma, 1946), others that racist humour can be offensive or cause psychological damage (Fry, 1977), or that it could affect group morale (La Fave, 1977). Many have suggested racist humour is of the Hobbesian kind, a laugh at sudden glory, a form of ridicule, or some other derivative of the superiority theory (e.g. Critchley, 2002: 70; Stott, 2005: 134). More critical accounts attempt to explain the wider consequences of racist humour, in terms of reinforcing racist ideology. In this vein, Sullivan argues that humour is 'a powerful communicator of prejudice' (2000: 47), and Berger argues 'that groups tend to seek out material... that reinforces their view of things and supports and validates their belief system' (1995b: 21). Boskin (1987) suggests that the act of comic repetition is significant for reinforcing beliefs and 'leads to responses in which critical judgement can be seriously impaired' (1987: 257), and, quoting Levine, that it leads to 'momentarily suspending "the rules of logic, time, place, reality, and proper conduct..." That momentary suspension can be extended through repetition so that the illusion becomes "locked in" and typed' (ibid: 260). However, he omits that humour has any effect *above* that achieved by serious racism without this repetition. Husband (1977, 1988) argues ethnic humour in Britain is distinctly culturally racist and, in line with Davies (1982), that stereotypes in humour often appear as binary oppositions, suggesting '[t]he stereotypical ethnic joke is thus more than the current repetition of an ossified cultural prejudice' (Husband, 1988: 155). This indicates that humour articulates ambivalence. Again, he suggests that comedy reinforces and reinvigorates stereotypes but does not describe *why* humour is a specific and important vehicle in distinction to serious communication.

The above studies highlight that while it is acknowledged that racist jokes reinforce serious stereotypes, most fail to explain the typology of *mechanisms* involved in the process. Without recourse to these mechanisms, such critiques lack the explanatory capacity to withstand the usual counterarguments employed to defend comic meaning. To provide detail of the relevant mechanisms and to elucidate those processes are the tasks of this thesis, and the original intervention it makes. Therefore, the argument, in a way that has not been done before, outlines how the semantic mechanisms of racist humour affect racist impressions of truth and ambivalence.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter One of the thesis begins with a brief outline of approaches that are the antithesis of the project - those that see all humour in a benign or positive light. Following the positioning of the research in the field, the central argument is presented that humour is a form of rhetoric. The purpose of Chapter One is to explain how humour is structured with linguistic mechanisms that are rhetorical devices. This is achieved through an examination of, in turn, three prominent theories of humour - the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the relief theory. These theories are discussed in chronological order. Superiority theory is examined as the basis for a conceptualisation of humour and laughter as a form of ridicule. I also outline the origins of thought on humour as a form of rhetoric, which hypothesises on the emergence of superiority theory. Following this, incongruity theory is used to provide key insights into how humorous incongruity is structurally rhetorical, which allows for an understanding of how it can influence truth perceptions and ambivalent discourses. This section also offers an explanation of why certain incongruities are humorous, and others not, through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. Relief theory is then examined to highlight an unconscious rhetorical expression in jokes, and how particular tropes aid the release of joking. The final two sections develop these observations; I formalise my methodology of rhetorical analysis, and finally, I use evidence from studies of humour that show humorous incongruities influencing the perception of serious discursive incongruity and ambivalence.

Zygmunt Bauman is a social theorist who is not often appreciated as someone whose categories can be specifically applied in detail and is often critiqued on the basis of his lack of empirical substantiation. Chapter Two seeks to overcome this problem by presenting a Baumanesque understanding of the function and effect of contemporary humour. This does not just involve applying Bauman's concepts to 'cases' of humour, rather it involves elaborating his categories with respect to racist humour and articulating them with other theorists. I employ Bauman's thesis on modernity, the development of order-building systems and the production and dislike of ambivalence in modernity, to argue that humour rhetorically affects the ambivalences and truth claims of racist discourse. Chapter Two outlines three types of race discourse - embodied, cultural and postmodern - and presents the case that humour can express and rhetorically resolve the incongruity, ambiguity, ambivalence and incoherence that is produced by each of these discourses, thus directly supporting the perceived truth of the discourse. Humour is not the only technique that can cope with or remove ambivalence.

Bauman conceptualises two other tropes that perform these tasks, namely 'proteophobia' and 'proteophilia'. Proteophobia is fear or hatred of multiform and proteophilia is love or adoration of multiform. These tropes are also shown to appear both in, and as responses to, race and ethnic humour, connecting with humour to form more robust rhetorical tropes for ambivalence removal.

Overall, the thesis typologizes three types of racist discourse that are reproduced in racist humour. These are 'embodied racism', 'cultural racism' and 'liquid racism'. In Chapter Three I apply the ideas of Chapters One and Two to the first type of racist humour - embodied racist joking - which is described as a derivative of biological racism. The central argument presented is that embodied racist humour rhetorically supports racist truth claims, and is used to disguise racist ambivalence and incongruity. First, the chapter presents Michel Wieviorka's dual logic of racism and specifically applies his theoretical dichotomy for an analysis of racist humour. This describes how humour socially includes the 'other' through inferiorization while also excluding the 'other' through expulsion. Following necessary discussions of race and racialization, I introduce the central dichotomy of embodied racism, which is created by the particular concepts of 'civilisation' and 'nature' and their associated connotations. Second, I give some examples of non-ambivalent or non-stereotyped racist jokes, with an outline of black and 'nigger' jokes. These form 'exemplary' embodied race signifiers that rhetorically support racism. This often occurs without the explicit presence of the stereotypes or dichotomies of embodied racism and conforms to the logic of exclusion. Third, I examine three themes of embodied racism that appear in humour, that develop as connotations of the civilisation/nature dichotomy and depict black people in the main through the logic of inferiorization. I examine a mind/body dichotomy that shows black people as stupid. I then examine jokes that portray a dichotomy that depicts black sexuality as savage and unrestrained. In connection with the racist description of the increased corporeality of black people, I examine jokes that depict the bodies of black people in certain types of social activity or habit. These include sport, crime and indolence.

In Chapter Four I examine a similar set of processes in humour that expresses cultural racism. I analyse the culturally racist logics that appear in certain types of humour, and their connections to other forms of prejudice and embodied racism, arguing that culturally racist humour generally focuses on specific types of ambivalence resolution. The chapter begins with a discussion of cultural racism as one which demarcates between groups and discriminates against an 'other' on the basis of an

identification of cultural difference. Cultural racism is also an order-building system because it attempts to order post-racial perceptions, and in so doing, creates logics that manage the image of the cultural 'other'. I discuss whether there is evidence that racist joking is a specific problem both of and for the working classes. I then outline three rhetorical themes that appear in humour which have the functional effect of supporting cultural racism. First, cultural racism is a form of coded racism that appears in response to the increasing unacceptability of biological racism. This task negotiates the attitudes of acceptability and unacceptability. Second, a negotiation of national territory that fixates on the maintenance and fears the transgression of national boundaries is examined in humour. This anxiety is created from issues of space and exclusion in cultural racism, focusing on those 'others' that move to the 'wrong' side of the boundary, and is a proteophobic concern that enforces the exclusionary logic of racism. Third, cultural racism encourages an ambivalence of social identity that negotiates the competing categories of the 'other' as an alien and a neighbour. This is generated by the presence of the 'other' in the immediate social location and employs stereotypes of cultural and linguistic practice. This task tends to focus on the logic of inferiorization through knowledge of the 'other' culture.

Chapter Five outlines what I label the 'reverse discourses' of black and Asian comedy. Reversed discourses appear in comic acts that employ the sign-systems of embodied and cultural racism, but develop a reversed semantic effect. It is argued that the humour of reversed discourses is significant in relation to racist truth claims and ambivalence management because it often forms resistance that can, first, act rhetorically against racist meaning and so attack both racist truth and points of ambivalence. Second, it can affect the ambivalence of the reversed discourse itself. Alongside this, and paradoxically, reversed discourses also contain a polysemic element that can, at times, reproduce racism. The chapter develops a means of analyzing this relationship between racist and non-racist meaning. The typology outlined shows some key styles in which racial stereotypes are employed and attacked in reversed discourse, and explains the potential degrees of functional influence that particular reversed discourses might have on the ambivalence of racism and the ambivalence of the reversed discourse. The chapter defines 'reversed discourse', before connecting the definition with existing literature that theorizes humour as an expression of resistance or as a counter discourse. I go on to divide reversed discourses into two broad types along the lines of racial categorization. First, I outline the reversed discourses produced by black comedians, before giving a specific analysis of the use of 'nigga' in the reversed discourse of embodied racism. Second, the chapter maps the reversed discourses in

British Asian comedy, by showing how this comedy reverses stereotypes and affects the ambivalence of hybrid identities. I employ Bauman's concepts of proteophobia and proteophilia in order to analyse responses to some of the comedians mentioned, which highlights the ongoing struggle to fix the meaning of the ambivalent 'other'. In a reversed discourse, with the 'other' of embodied and cultural racism creating humour that openly attacks this racism, the discourse may actively produce further ambivalence for the racist discourses. In some instances, proteophobia and proteophilia are mobilised as a reaction to this active comic 'other', which acts as a further attempt to fix the ambivalence that these comedians, or the 'other', provokes. Hence, these reactions begin to appear outside of the comic frame.

In building on the identification of polysemia, Chapter Six presents a further complication in race and ethnic humour and illustrates 'postmodern humour' and the 'liquid racism' that can appear in it. I argue the polysemic element present in all humour is multiplied in postmodern humour at the expense of a dissipation, or alongside a disguise of, authorial intention. The chapter argues postmodern humour and liquid racism appear in Sacha Baron Cohen's characters Ali G and Borat. Beginning with a definition of postmodern humour as a distinct type that exhibits Bauman's characteristics of postmodernity, the definition is distinguished from the clichéd assumption of the postmodern mood as ironic. Second, I give a definition of liquid racism as the polysemic and elusive racism of postmodern social formations, including postmodern humour, and one that encourages reflexivity in the viewer. Ali G is examined as ambiguous and as misidentified, before being described as expressing three strands of liquid racism. These are labelled 'postmodern minstrelsy', 'ethno-cultural hybrid racism' and 'anti-Asian racism'. It is the combination of the three, and the erasure they inflict on each other, that renders these forms liquid. After this, the chapter charts the appearance around Baron Cohen's characters of Bauman's tropes for ambivalence removal, proteophobia and proteophilia. The final section outlines some non-racist themes in Ali G that add to the polysemia and encourage analytic confusion because of the increased complexity of the material. Baron Cohen's character Borat Sagdiyev is then examined as a second postmodern character and as influenced by Jewish humour.

In Chapter Seven the themes of postmodern humour and liquid racism are developed in a different direction, one that has specific political implications. The chapter undertakes a rhetorical analysis of the Danish Prophet Muhammed cartoons, published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in October 2005, and the January 2006

reactions to them. I highlight how no other account of the cartoons from inside or outside of sociology describes them as, initially, polysemic humorous signs. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the events surrounding the publication of the cartoons, before concentrating on a description of the cartoons themselves. I consider the two cartoons that are usually viewed as most offensive. These two are given a specific rhetorical analysis and I describe the trajectory of meanings produced by their incongruity. Following this, I outline the general arguments of those who consider the cartoons offensive, evaluating the concepts of blasphemy, and importantly for this thesis, Islamophobia and racism in relation to the cartoons. Third, I outline the liberal secular defence of the publication of the cartoons, on the basis of freedom of speech, and explain how the cartoons fit the European tradition of satire. Finally, some comments are made on Bauman's argument on the relationship between the rise of postmodernity and fundamentalism, because while I argue the cartoons have a postmodern dimension, so too does Islamic fundamentalism, which is the target of their intended meaning and present in some reactions to them.

The conclusion reiterates the central observations of the thesis, especially that racist humour is a form of racist rhetoric that supports serious racism, and presents the wider applicability of the thesis for what might be called an emerging subject - sociological humour studies. My method of analysis is shown to suggest uses for further development that, to date, sociological accounts have failed to offer. In the process I hope to re-specify the relation between humour and other discursive/ideological modalities. This restates the originality of the approach and situates the thesis in the fields of both sociology and humour studies, alongside accounts that have examined the structure and rhetoric of humour (e.g. Eco, 1985; Palmer, 1987; Berger, 1995a, 1998) and those that seek to develop critical accounts of humour (e.g. Billig, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; Lockyer and Pickering, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). All of which adds to the mainstream need and appeal of sociological humour studies.

Chapter One

Humour Theories, Rhetoric and Critique

Introduction

The aim of Chapter One is to present an observation, from humour studies, that runs throughout the thesis and aids the development of a critique of racist humour. This is the observation of the identical semantic structure of humour and rhetorical devices. This leads to an understanding of the ability of these rhetorical humorous structures to have an influence on truth perceptions, ambivalent social discourses and, specifically, ambivalent racist discourses. This foundation will allow me to describe the range of effects that humour is capable of having and the functions it is able to perform, in differentiation to, and specifically *for,* literal or serious communication. When, in later chapters, this is applied to racist humour, it allows us to begin to see what it is - in relation to the spectrum of forms of racism - that racist humour actually does. While some of these points may seem obvious, they have not been specifically articulated as such in the analysis or normative critique of racist humour.

The chapter examines humour theories in order to develop the necessary foundational points for a critique of racist humour, specifically moving through three dominant theories of humour - the 'superiority theory', the 'incongruity theory' and the 'relief theory' - to elicit, from the relevant preceding work in the field, the key points on the relationship between humour, rhetoric, truth perceptions and ambivalence management. This relationship is then reinforced in the final two sections. First, through the development of a rhetorical method of humour analysis; and second, through an explanation of the influence of humour on ambivalence.

Before that, the first two sections outline and critique two approaches to the study of humour that are especially problematic due to their partiality as explanatory frameworks. A partiality that leads to their mobilisation for the uncritical excusing of racist humour. These are, importantly, approaches that have an amount of contemporary popularity. I label these the 'exculpatory approach' and the 'positive approach'.

A Joke is a Joke is a Joke: Exculpatory Approaches to Humour

An exculpatory approach towards humour can be typified as one that suggests that humour is, in all instances, a harmless or benign form of communication - that it can do no wrong. This has some everyday or 'commonsense' articulation that usually describes humour as 'just a joke', but it also appears in academic accounts of humour. Contrary to this, research shows that the use of the phrase 'just a joke' can represent a rhetorical method of excusing the content and impact of the material of a joke, as a way 'of saying one thing and meaning another' (Tannen, 1992: 51; see also Billig, 2005a).

The journalist and writer Howard Jacobson offers an account that is exculpatory in nature (Jacobson, 1997, 2006). His discussion attempts to reclaim all vulgar, coarse and offensive laughter as that which 'makes our hearts strong' (1997: 37). This is a category that includes racist humour (ibid: 34). Those politically correct functionaries who oppose such humour are described with invective, or perhaps humour, and thus for Jacobson, 'a humourless little shit will always be a humourless little shit' (ibid: 15).

Importantly, and in direct opposition to the argument of this thesis, Jacobson sees the non-literal in humour, a 'world of dramatic make-believe', or 'a fiction' (ibid: 36), as the reason for humorous meaning being unimportant:

> Once accept that a joke is a structured dialogue with itself, that it cannot, by its nature, be an expression of opinion, and you have conceded its unalikeness to racist discourse, which by *its* nature is impermeable and cannot abide a contradiction. [sic] (ibid. Original emphasis)

This statement fails for a number of reasons and highlights the perfect misunderstanding of Jacobson's position. Obviously, to suggest that humour cannot express opinion is wrong and to separate racist discourse from a particular type of racist discourse constructs a false dichotomy, but most importantly, the existence of contradiction and ambivalence in racism *has* been documented in the social sciences (Adorno et al., 1950; Billig et al., 1988: 106; Billig, 1982, 1985; Rattansi, 2007: 114). What is ignored by Jacobson is that non-literal language is anything but meaningless, that racist humour has the ability to remove contradiction and anxiety from serious racism. Thus Jacobson's argument remains blind to the functionality of racist humour.

Christie Davies' work is exemplary of the academic exculpation of humour. Davies aligns himself with the 'semantic script theory' of Victor Raskin (1985), has produced

extensive empirical studies on the global phenomena of ethnic humour (Davies, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2005a), and has also edited non-critical, non-academic joke books (Davies and Lewis, 1973; Davies, 1978). His advocacy of a benign interpretation of humour is also highlighted in his critique of attempts to censure broadcast comedy (1994, c2004b), in which he labels recent BBC policy a 'restrictive authoritarian ideology' (1994). Throughout his work there are recurring flaws that highlight the explanatory partiality of the exculpatory position.

Davies accepts a straightforward dichotomy of the comic and the serious, via Raskin's separation of bona-fide communication and comic communication. This allows him to give little credence to the idea that humour can act seriously as a form of ridicule, thus ignoring over two thousand years of philosophical thought on the 'superiority theory', which he would likely dismiss as a false paradigm. He therefore absolves the joker of any responsibly for causing ridiculous meaning in humour and argues 'we should not mistake the glee of the winners in this successful piece of playful aggression for real hostility' (1998a: 13). While Davies (1994) has admitted that race and ethnic humour might be offensive, he does this through a reified concept of 'political correctness'. He admits ethnic humour might offend 'political correctness', but does not attach this offence to particular groups or individuals.

Davies also argues that humour could have no 'unconscious' or cryptic meaning, thus rendering 'relief theory' obsolete. He claims that 'it is pointless to search for hidden motives and resentments and, indeed, the attempt to do so, far from advancing our understanding of humour, has hindered it' (ibid: 25). These comments accompany no theoretical development or justification.

While Davies is unwilling to examine the effects of humour in case it renders ethnic humour in need of critique, there are examples where he, inadvertently, gives an acknowledgement of the communicative and rhetorical effect that humour can have, in terms of the wider potential of the semantic mechanisms involved. This exposes contradiction in his approach and highlights the central relevance of my own. For example, he acknowledges that humour is 'interesting, appealing and entertaining' (c2004b: 6), yet does not examine how it is that humour differs from literal communication - outside of the distinction between bona-fide and comic communication - or how it becomes 'interesting, appealing and entertaining'. Davies refuses to fully examine the difference between the types of meaning generated by humorous and non-humorous language.

Davies also admits that jokes may use ambiguity and ambivalence but does not give a full analysis of the effects of humour on ambivalence. He suggests that humour 'always introduces ambiguity as to both purpose and meaning' (2005b: 343), and that users of humour, '[b]y mocking peripheral and ambiguous groups ... reduce ambiguity and clarify boundaries or at least make ambiguity less frightening' (1982: 400). Despite this observation, his analysis of ambivalence is incomplete. So, for example, he *does* highlight how ambivalence surrounds attitudes to alcohol use and how this is expressed in humour, arguing that attitudes towards alcohol 'are varied, unstable and contradictory' (1998a: 101) and that '[j]okes about alcohol are most common under circumstances of moral uncertainty and disagreement about whether and how alcohol should be consumed (ibid). However, he *does not* adequately explain why, in the very same jokes, this alcohol use is ascribed to ethnic groups outside of an explanation that argues, '[s]uch jokes are especially likely to be told about members of ethnic groups whose particular, visible and distinctive patterns of drinking reveal an even greater degree of ambivalence towards, and uncertainty and disagreement about alcohol than is usual in other western societies' (ibid). He adds that '[t]he jokes... are often pinned on ethnic groups whose alcohol problems are more severe than those of the joke-tellers' (ibid: 134). This suggests that stereotypes are simply an accurate reflection of reality. Davies can admit that ambivalence is relevant in the formation of jokes about alcohol because it is a morally ambiguous activity but, because he accepts the notion that ethnic stereotypes on alcohol use are relatively correct, he is unable to see how the jokes, through negative moralisation, render an ambivalent activity morally coherent through its placement on an ethnic 'other' that drinks. This obscures the role of the joke as a rhetorical device that strengthens stereotypes, and in that strengthening, 'repairs' ambivalent attitudes to alcohol use.

Davies refuses to consider the potential effect of comic meaning on the designated 'other' of the joke, perhaps as a form of rhetorical false consciousness. His work often expresses and supports ethnic and national stereotypes in a serious context as argumentation, which implies he believes in the stereotypes expressed. He argues that a joke content is at times created by the majority adhering to a stereotypical behaviour (1998a). For example, he argues '[t]he very generosity of the Irish character probably helps to account for the prevalence of thriftlessness and improvidence' (1982: 389) (see also: 2005b: 343). In sum, his rationale lacks empathy for the 'other' of the joke, which is exemplified in the following comment: 'We know that jokes are important to us and of no consequence to anyone else and we will have the jokes we want and on our terms whether you like them or not' (c2004b: 40).

Positive Accounts of Humour

There is some overlap between exculpatory and positive accounts of humour, but there are also important differences. Exculpatory accounts tend to describe humour as having desirable consequences only, while positive accounts often acknowledge that there are ethically questionable types of humour, such as sexist or racist joking, but generally pay little attention to these. Positive accounts naturalise one particular type of humour as *the* majority type. The positive approach dominates the psychology of humour (Billig, 2005a: Chapter Two, provides an excellent critique of this) and medical research. On the former, Billig argues 'popular psychology books that are aimed at a wide non-academic readership... promote laughter as a means to improve the quality of their readers' lives (ibid: 16). In the latter, the healing properties of humour and laughter form a burgeoning research interest (e.g. Capple and Ziebland, 2004; Goodenough and Ford, 2005), yet it is rare to discover contemporary articles on the potential negative mental or physical consequences of humour, laughter and ridicule, which could be examined in relation to bullying at any social level. So, for example, Hogh and Dofradottir (2001) examine the role of humour as a coping strategy in response to Danish workplace bullying but do not mention the role of humour in bullying itself.

In the discipline of humour studies, the idea that humour is in the main a positive social phenomenon has grown in popularity since the development of eighteenth century 'incongruity theory' and the demise of the dominance of the 'superiority theory'. Morreall provides an example of this view: 'There are few things on which we place more value than having a good laugh' (Morreall, 1987: viii). Morreall, as is typical of this approach, does not add that there are also few things on which we place more value than having the ability to laugh at someone, to ridicule them, and then disguise any serious intent by explaining that it was all 'just a joke'. Coupled with this is the supposedly frivolous nature of the academic subject, so Berger suggests '[w]riting one book on humor can be looked upon, by those who have a charitable disposition, as a youthful (or, in my case, not so youthful) indiscretion' (1995a: xi). Overall in humour studies, the functions of humour are described as positive (e.g. Attardo, 1994: 328), and descriptions appear one-dimensional because they do not consider the 'nastier' side of interpretations of humour by joke targets. For example, Berger's (1998: 16) analysis of forty-five techniques for producing humour reads more like a guide for those attempting to become comedians than for those involved in serious analysis. This highlights the zeitgeist of humour studies.

Positive functional explanations of humour have been extended to ethnic joking. Some argue that ethnic joking may facilitate certain conversations (La Gaipa, 1977), and, crossing the boundary between exculpatory and positive accounts, Davies' numerous empirical studies of ethnic humour also frequently advocate its positive or entertaining dimensions. Husband (1977, 1988), in a neo-Marxist account of racism in British humour, critically summarises the logic of a positive account of ethnic, race or racist humour. He argues that racist humour is informed by British race relations and reflects dominant race discourses. He outlines the commonsense 'positive' attitudes to humour which suggest: '(a) humour is a positive social activity; (b) tolerance is a positive social value; (c) therefore ethnic humour is a quintessential manifestation of tolerance in praxis' (Husband, 1988: 152). This logic is directly reflected in the zeitgeist of humour studies.

More detail of two positive functions are described below, those that see humour as a form of 'conflict management' and those that see humour as a 'coping strategy'. Each approach is shown to be inadequate for an analysis of racist or ethnic joking.

An early account of humour as a form of 'conflict management' appears in the anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown, who, through his concept of the 'joking relationship', identified 'rules' that govern joke telling in particular tribal societies:

> What is meant by the term 'joking relationship' is a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence. (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 90)

Many joking relationships existed in the tribal societies Radcliffe-Brown studied, but all occurred at points in the social structure, around dynamics such as age, gender or kinship differences, where a relationship was considered ambivalent and held the potential for conflict. Radcliffe-Brown suggested that the joking relationship had a regulatory role, by controlling behaviour between members of the social group, or by restricting certain actions to a non-serious arena. In theorising such relations between in-laws, he argues,

> The theory that is put forward, therefore, is that both the joking relationship which constitutes an alliance between clans or tribes, and that between relatives by marriage, are modes of organising a definite and stable system of social behaviour in which conjunctive and disjunctive components, as I have called them, are maintained and combined. (ibid: 95)

Radcliffe-Brown explains how the joking relationship served to remove the tension and ambivalence of particular relations, with conjunctive and disjunctive components - or the various elements of ambivalence - forming the material of humour. Such joking did not appear around relations of friendship.

The concept of the joking relationship has been applied extensively for the study of both tribal and industrial societies (Richards, 1927; Pedler, 1940; Moreau, 1941, in relation to tribal societies, and Sykes, 1966; Bradley, 1957, in relation to industrial societies), and has been applied, in a diluted format, in later sociology and conversational analysis, (Sacks, 1995; Gundelach, 2000; Sanders, 2004). The later diluted format acts as a means of overcoming the successful critique of its rigid structural-functionalism (Palmer, 1994: 15). Importantly, the joking relationship has also been applied to ethnic relations *between* tribal societies in Northern Rhodesia, tribes that either had a history of conflict or held the potential for conflict (Clyde-Mitchell, 1974: 36).

Specifically, Clyde-Mitchell's study explains how the joking relationship appeared between tribal groups in situations that could be seen as ambivalent, as both conflicting and non-conflicting for the social actors involved. However, the description of the relations as a form of conflict management remains a partial analysis. While joking may allow for tensions to be resolved in the short term, much of the literature, especially contemporary uses of the concept (e.g. Gundelach, 2000; Sanders, 2004) emphasise conflict management as a positive value. This positivity ignores that joking may perpetuate serious tensions that might be resolved in other discursive forms. Likewise, by transferring the conflict into a linguistic realm that will, ultimately, do nothing to seriously question or work on the ambivalence that exists and continues to exist in serious discourse, humour might more adequately be described as something that can disguise as well as manage tension. Later in the chapter such joking will be shown to act as a palliative for serious discourse, a palliative that clears the path for the re-emergence of identical tension.

The idea that humour acts as a 'coping strategy' is closely connected to the idea that it acts as a form of conflict management, that it allows for events to be dealt with that might otherwise cause distress. It has been suggested that, in times of stress, humour can have a cohesive effect (Morreall, 1998: 115), and that through expelling tension it 'facilitates social interaction in a number of situations' (ibid: 116). These ideas are popular in the social sciences and psychology (McGhee, 1979) and are applied to a

variety of topics. For example, Mealyea (1989) describes humour as a coping strategy in occupational change and Sanders (2004) describes how humour acts as a coping strategy for prostitutes. Gundelach (2000), in a study of national joking patterns between Scandinavian countries also describes jokes in a positive light as a form of coping strategy. In management psychology, Lee and Kleiner (2005) uncritically discuss how humour can be used for stress management, arguing '[l]aughter works to manage stress and has no side effects' (2005: 181) and Hoch and Dofradottir (2001) examine humour as a coping strategy for the victims of workplace bullying.

By describing humour as a coping strategy, these approaches focus on the sense of release that humour may generate, or the effect for the joker and receptive audience. While the description of humour as a coping strategy has some commonsense explanatory power, it is only a partial explanation because it assumes coping, in every situation, to be an ethically equivalent activity. Events vary, so for example, coping with bullying or death are very different activities than an ethnic majority 'coping' with an ethnic minority. If the primary function of humour really was that of coping, we might expect far more jokes about events that people really do have to cope with. As death is an almost universal concern, whereas concerns over race, ethnicity and racism are far more eclectic, one might expect more jokes about death or fear of death. On the universality of death jokes, Cohen (1999) provides a critical discussion of the propriety of joking about death, suggesting that this is, at times, inappropriate (Cohen, 1999: 69). Davies has questioned the notion that death jokes are a coping strategy. He suggests that jokes about the death of Princess Diana were invented by 'those who had no strong feelings about this particular accident and saw it as no different from the mass of anonymous events that make up French traffic mortality statistics' (c2004b: 13). While it is unlikely that the jokers saw the incident as no different from any other French traffic accident, it is quite uncommon for people to construct grotesque, unsentimental humour about their dead loved ones as a coping strategy. What *is* common are death jokes about groups for which one does not care where perhaps one should. It seems that jokes claiming to cope with the latest ethno-racial minority are also very common.

In terms of racist humour, jokes may act as a type of coping mechanism for the racist, in the form of a palliative because the effects of joking allow for the expression, reinforcement and denial of racism. This in no way excuses racist humour and accounts of humour as a coping strategy that see it in a positive light should instead examine the ethical impact of what they claim is being coped with. These accounts rely on a narrow focus that may consider the joker and receptive audience, and their instant gratification,

but little else. For a more complete dissection of racist humour we must revisit some more established thought.

Three Traditions in Humour Studies

It is widely documented that three theories - the superiority theory, the incongruity theory and the relief theory - have dominated humour studies, and have influenced a wide array of disciplinary approaches (Morreall 1987; Palmer, 1994; Critchley 2002; Billig, 2005a). In some cases there exists a general preoccupation for developing universal accounts (Beryne, 1972; Latta, 1999), and the three theoretical positions have been reported as competing interpretations of humour. At a more sophisticated level, most pioneering theories of humour, for example Freud's (1991 [1905]) or Bergson's (1911), necessarily contain elements of all three theoretical strands.

As such, this thesis does not present a simplistic three-step synthesis of the three theories (c.f. Wear et al., 2006), rather it is an account, like other contemporary examples (e.g. Billig, 2005a; Palmer, 1987) that presents a theoretical perspective on humour that serves to critically engage with and integrate elements of the three theories. I therefore do not see the three theories as *competing* accounts, but rather as necessary stops along the way to any developed theory. If there is a particular emphasis in my account it falls on 'incongruity theory' which is often seen as the least relevant for analysing humour and offensiveness (c.f. Freud, 1991 [1905]; Billig, 2005a), because it tends to concentrate on the linguistic structure of humour, rather than the effect of that structure on joke content or meaning.

Superiority Theories

It is the orthodoxy in studies of humour to acknowledge the 'superiority theory' as the earliest theoretical approach. As the oldest of the three theories, it is said to have dominated philosophical thought on the subject for two thousand years up until the eighteenth century (Morreall, 1998: 4; Critchley, 2002: 3). Although some doubt that it constitutes a theory at all and suggest, rightly, that it represents a collection of undeveloped philosophical comments on humour and laughter (Billig, 2005a: 38), it is

almost always acknowledged as significant as a point of departure for most subsequent and noteworthy theories.

The superiority theory argues that humour and laughter are created from, and convey, a sense of superiority over the object of laughter. Humour is described as a means of mocking and ridiculing the subject of the joke, so describing laughter with a particularly invective intentionality (Scruton, 1987). For this reason, many superiority theorists have argued that humour and laughter should be resisted or controlled, or have 'expressed a wish to reduce the amount of frivolity in the cause of a serious philosophy or theology' (Billig, 2005a: 37). This attitude appears in opposition to many subsequent or contemporary understandings of humour, such as the exculpatory and positive accounts outlined previously.

Two examples of the superiority theory are presented as a means of elucidating its relevance for a critique of racist humour and for showing how there exists an implicit but ongoing historical recognition of the rhetorical structure of humour - as a specifically communicative and convincing art form - a connection that is often not recognised today. The discussion focuses on the comments of Plato and Aristotle, who are the two earliest such theorists. This is not a definitive history of the theory, and contributions from Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes are not mentioned. The aim is to show the direct relevance of the position for developing a critique of racist humour as a form of rhetoric, rather than to provide a comprehensive history of the theory. Plato and Aristotle, and the surrounding socio-political conditions in which their ideas emerged, do this particularly well.

The superiority theory is said to have originated in Plato's comments on laughter and ridicule. To be overcome with laughter was, for Plato, not befitting of the philosopher and a threat to rationality and social order. For this reason, Plato thought it important that laughter should be controlled. He wrote that in enjoying ridicule, 'the malicious man is somehow pleased at his neighbor's misfortune' (Plato in Morreall, 1987: 10), and that 'the ridiculous is a certain kind of evil, specifically a vice' (Plato in ibid: 11). These comments were certainly not spurious. Plato's seriousness about laughter extended to argue that laughter that mocks authority was, along with the Arts, to be suppressed in the Republic (ibid: 102; Billig, 2005a: 41).

Having said that, and while Plato sought to discourage laughter, if it was derived from a particular political ethic and directed at another, less suitable ethic, he thought

that it could be tolerated. This is acknowledged in the areas of Plato's writing that contain comic moments (Billig, 2005a: 41) and exposes Plato's position on laughter to be a class-based or partisan account of the acceptability of mirth, rather than the universal comment that it presents itself as. In describing the type of comedy that Plato found unsuitable, Billig outlines a specific example of a ridiculous Greek comedy that mocked Socrates: 'Aristophanes mocked him and other philosophers on the stage. In *The Clouds*, Socrates, the master of high philosophical ideas, is portrayed as a comic figure' (ibid: 42). While *The Clouds* is an example of the type of ridiculous comedy that Plato disproved of, it is, importantly, also a comedy that illuminates the rhetorical structure of humour. I will return to this example below where I explain the particular rhetorical qualities of humour and laughter that Plato found so troublesome, and specifically, how this relates to a critique of racist humour.

Aristotle held similar views on comedy, seeing it as often derisive and as providing a method for viewing the object of the joke as inferior (Palmer, 1994: 94). Like Plato, he also 'opposed coarse humour and ribaldry' (Bremmer, 1997: 19), and wrote that '[c]omedy ... is an imitation of people who are worse than the average... The ridiculous... is a species of the ugly' (Aristotle in Morreall, 1987: 14). Like Plato, Aristotle could appreciate the middle ground of educated wit over outright buffoonery or a complete lack of comedy, creating a distinction between educated and uneducated laughter (Billig, 2005a: 44). In *Rhetoric,* Aristotle acknowledged that 'ridicule can be persuasively used' (ibid), and so educated laughter might serve an 'important' function as a form of social discipline. Importantly though, Aristotle chose to ignore the persuasive potential of outright buffoonery. So while in *Rhetoric,* he signals an acknowledgement of the rhetorical potential of laughter, of it as a form of persuasion, we will see that it is significant that he did not investigate the persuasive potential of buffoonery.

To develop these ideas, I examine what Plato found so troublesome about laughter and ridicule, and why Aristotle avoided examining the persuasive potential of buffoonery. Since all theoretical developments have a socio-historical situatedness influencing their emergence, these questions can be addressed through an examination of the conditions in which the superiority theory emerged. Aristophanes' *The Clouds* is particularly illuminating for it is the type of comedy that Plato would have disapproved of (Billig, 2005a: 42). The specific reasons for *The Clouds* being of significance are, first, it is a comedy that deals with the topic of sophistic rhetoric; second, it explicitly

shows that comedy is structured with the use of rhetorical devices; and third, it employs the comic technique of buffoonery.

Beginning with sophistic rhetoric, in ancient Greece, '[r]hetoricians taught the art of public persuasion' (Billig, 2005a: 44), and this was disliked by Plato and others who saw it as an abuse of the search for philosophical truth. Aristophanes' was one of Socrates known accusers (Russell, 1946: 104), and principally, the subject of his comedy is sophistic rhetoric, *The Clouds* 'begins with an ordinary man's search for new, more effective speech; [and] portrays his education (or lack thereof) at the hands of an abstracted, sophistic Socrates…' (O'Regan, 1992: 3-4). In making a direct, albeit comic attack on Socrates, the socio-political events of the day are intertwined with the comedy. This had potential impact; such comedies were performed at comic competitions that were important expressions of Athenian ideology (Palmer, 1994: 31; O'Regan, 1992: 3), while the comic audience would have been drawn from a group with political status:

> Gathered in the theatre in "civic assembly," they were the same group, seated in similar order, as that which elsewhere voted the political and legal decisions of the city. Thus political (and juridical) rhetoric and theatrical discourse would have influenced each other reciprocally, the audience for each conditioned by its experience of the other. Likewise, the tasks of a comedian were, in one sense, those of any other speaker: he had to further his own (and the public) good by winning over his listeners, who, in judging his *logos*, or speech, to be best, would render him victorious over his rivals. (ibid. Original emphasis)

The political classes would have viewed comedy presented in this setting as a specific rhetorical endeavour. O'Regan continues: 'To ignore the intellectual, rhetorical, and political background to Aristophanes' jokes is to misunderstand them and to overlook his participation in the intellectual ferment of the times' (ibid: 5). It is evident that the content of this comedy, which Plato disapproved of, is specifically connected to the serious issues of the day.

Aristophanes also structured his comedies through the use of rhetorical devices (Slings, 2002). *The Clouds* employs a wide array of comic techniques, it uses, 'farce and wit, stereotypical characters and situations, slapstick, wild dancing, obscenity, insult, puns, and sophisticated allusions to mock a wide variety of political, social, and theatrical butts' (O'Regan, 1992: 3). The various joke structures are employed to develop different types of incongruity, each of which has the potential for a specific rhetorical effect when combined with the correct content.

The use of buffoonery is also significant in *The Clouds*, especially as Plato and Aristotle viewed this as a lower form of comedy. Specifically, the structure of *The Clouds* presents an incongruity between high philosophy and natural man, which is exaggerated through the use of buffoonery. The presentation of high-minded seriousness alongside buffoonery serves to construct an incongruity of extremes. Schopenhauer once said of the elements that make up an incongruity, 'the greater and more glaring their incongruity with it from the other, the more powerful is the effect of the ludicrous which springs from this contrast' (1969: 59). In buffoonery, the incongruous elements are 'stretched' beyond the range of that possible by the use of acceptable wit, and because of this, its comic impact is *increased*. This 'stretching' of incongruity aids the rhetorical effect of comedy, by creating a greater disjuncture between the elements. This directly presents some reasoning for Plato and Aristotle's dislike of such a technique, especially when it was aimed at Socrates. Moreover, there is also evidence that buffoonery made *The Clouds* more successful. O'Regan explains that in the first unsuccessful version,

> Aristophanes had discarded many of the obscene and violent aspects of conventional comedy in favor of purely verbal wit. The failure of this early attempt, the inadequacy of *Logos* alone to win over the audience and carry the poet to victory, is written deeply into [its] ... humor, structure and even its "message". (1992: 5)

The Clouds suggest that we can infer that the superiority theory, a theory of comedy as an expression of ridicule, which is central for an understanding of racist humour, developed at a specific historical point as a reaction to the potential socio-political and specifically *rhetorical* influence of certain instances of comedy. *The Clouds* shows how laughter was, for Plato and Aristotle, not considered to be benign or simplistically positive, as is often the case today. The sense of ridicule towards Socrates was generated by the rhetorical effect of the comedy, by the development of certain types of incongruity. It would seem that the ancient Greeks understood the rhetorical power of comedy and its ability to ridicule. Plato and Aristotle initiated the superiority theory on the basis of an understanding of how comedy and laughter can ridicule, yet today positive accounts dominate and hinder the development of critique.

Contemporary studies have critically applied superiority theory for an analysis of laughter as mockery. De Sousa (1987) presents an ambitious argument for the development of an ethics of laughter. He argues that 'emotions can be rationally evaluated' (1987: 227), and that a phthonic or malicious element exists in certain types

of humour. Through an example of a rape joke, he explains that shared attitudes are necessary for a joke to be considered funny by an audience (ibid: 232):

> In contrast to the element of wit, the *phthonic* element of the joke requires *endorsement.* It does not allow of hypothetical laughter. The phthonic makes us laugh only insofar as the assumptions on which it is based are attitudes actually shared. Suspension of disbelief in the situation can and must be achieved for the purpose of the joke, suspension of attitudes cannot be. (ibid: 240. Original emphasis)

He explains that 'attitudes are beliefs that one cannot hypothetically adopt' (ibid: 241). We cannot, therefore, pretend laughter through a process of empathy. For the content of the joke to be considered funny we must share an ideological predisposition, which will be rephrased later in my argument to suggest that a certain sign content is necessary for the construction of racist humour, and that this content must have serious relevance for the audience. In moving away from de Sousa, a critique of racist humour can be developed through mapping the meanings of humour rather than attempting to prove cases of intent or serious belief.

Garfinkel (1967) gives an early account of the disciplinary function of humour and describes it as a part of a continuum of responses directed at anti-social behaviour. This continuum progresses from humorous reaction, definitions of the subject as crazy, to that of evil if the behaviour persists. Billig has also made significant progress through re-emphasising the role of humour as a form of ridicule and social discipline (2001, 2005a, 2005b). He argues that humour has an important disciplinary function as a method of instilling embarrassment (2005a: 236), and describes that laughter is a learnt process that can have a rhetorical impact. This is successful as a general theory of the disciplinary nature of ridicule but does not address the important occurrence of humour in absence of the target, its rhetorical and incongruous structure or the range of discursive effects on ambivalence.

The superiority theory has its detractors. It has been described by some in the incongruity camp as 'sloppy theorising' (Morreall, 1987: 4), which 'could not serve as a comprehensive theory of laughter' (Morreall, 1998: 14), and blamed for an ongoing neglect of humour in philosophy (Morreall, 1987: ix). Despite this it offers a basis for the development of a critique of racist humour. While Morreall describes the theory as one that 'made humour ethically suspect' (ibid: 3), many types of humour *are* deemed to be ethically questionable (see de Sousa, 1987; Billig, 2005a; Lockyer and Pickering, 2005a), which makes the reasoning of these philosophers especially interesting.

Specifically, the focus of the superiority theory leads towards the development of an account that can question specific types of humour, as Billig outlines, the 'theory addresses aspects of humour that may lie at the root of social order in the form of disciplinary humour' (2005a: 39). Racist jokes can, through this approach, be seen as techniques for expressing superiority over the object of the joke (Berger, 1998: 65; Critchley, 2002: 70; Stott, 2005: 135). If humour can be mobilised as a form of mockery, if it is used to ridicule an ethnic or racial group, it is possible to begin a critique of racist humour at this point. This, however, is a fairly obvious point that *does* need elaboration through other theoretical perspectives.

The theme of superiority is not a universal factor in joking, even if it is a contingent factor in some, and in terms of explaining the effect of racist humour, it is not adequate to merely apply the ideas without development. It is necessary to examine incongruity theory and explore the semantic mechanisms involved in constructing humour generally, as this will allow us to distinguish how these mechanisms convey meaning as ridicule in contrast to other forms of meaning. This will prove significant because it allows for a distinction to be made between the effect of humour and other types of language use, and to counter defences that claim that humorous utterances are universally benign.

Incongruity Theories

The second major theoretical approach for studying humour is described as 'incongruity theory'. Of the three theories it provides the potential for developing new and novel ways to critique humour because it specifically highlights the *structural* connection between humour and rhetoric.

It is suggested that Aristotle first mentioned that laughter is produced as a reaction to incongruity (Morreall, 1987: 14), although it did not receive theoretical development until the eighteenth century in Francis Hutcheson's *Reflections on Laughter* (1750) (Critchley, 2002: 3). It also appears in the work of the philosophers Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer and Søren Kierkegaard. It is not possible to provide a complete history of the idea, so what follows is a presentation of those elements of the theory that are most helpful for highlighting what racist humour does, and that elucidate the semantic mechanisms that allow humour to create ridicule.

Incongruity theory argues that humour is experienced when we perceive incongruous elements, such as the experience of the unexpected, or two objects being placed together in an unusual way, and so represents an explanation of the generation rather than the effect or function of humour. 'Incongruity' is usually loosely defined in humour studies to describe all humorous events or joke structures. As Berger outlines, '[t]he term "incongruity" has many different meanings - inconsistent, not harmonious, lacking propriety and not conforming' (1998: 3). There is a general consensus in humour studies that all humour is constructed through the observation of an incongruity of some kind (Morreall, 1998: 19),[1] although not all incongruities are humorous (this issue is examined below). This consensus has led to it becoming the 'most popular current philosophical theory of humour' (Morreall, 1987: 6), and to it being extensively applied in many areas of humour studies (e.g. Perlmutter, 2002).

There are points relating to the structure of humorous incongruity that must be examined in order to build an effective critique of racist humour, most of which have some connection to the construction of a linguistic paradox. This section proposes that the incongruities of humour are structured using rhetorical devices (defined below), which leads to an appreciation of a number of functions that humour can serve. Specifically, it is argued that humour can (1) redefine reality, can (2) 'co-agitate' disparate elements, and can (3) create semantic alienation. Each of these processes depends upon the acceptance of the reader or audience and the context; changes in the position of the audience will affect each process. Towards the end of the section, Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus' is employed to develop an account of changes in humorous context.

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[1] Two exceptions appear in Latta (1999) and Scruton (1987). Latta presents a universal philosophical account of humour labelled 'Theory L'. He argues the basic humour process consists of three stages, 1) unrelaxation, 2) a cognitive shift, 3) relaxation. Latta dichotomises theories of humour into stimulus side and response side theories, with incongruity theories being placed on the stimulus side, and argues that 'if theory L is true, then all incongruity theories - all theories which ought to be classified as such - are false' (1999: vii). His 'response side' theory ignores the sociality of humour and any explanation of it, representing a reductive philosophical account of humour. Latta's aims are also singular and diverge from those of my own. He states, 'surely the ultimate goal of research into humor is to describe and explain the global phenomena in all its main aspects and connections' (ibid: 13). Scruton (1987) argues that incongruity cannot form the 'formal object' of humour (the object in every instance). He provides examples, one such is caricature, arguing that it is the similarity with rather than the difference between the object and the humorous image that creates humour in caricature. Of course this is not a criticism of incongruity theory per se, just the degree of incongruity, as all caricatures have some degree of both similarity and difference between objects. Scruton concentrates on the similarity or connection between the two elements of an incongruity, and so, in attempting to critique incongruity theory, simply highlights the aspect that would connect the elements, rather than the exaggeration that would separate them. In caricature this is especially evident. It is less evident in other types of humour.

The first step that needs to be taken in understanding humorous incongruity is an understanding of its rhetorical structure. As is hinted at in the writings of Aristotle, humour and laughter often work rhetorically as a form of ridicule, and structurally, humour is created with specific semantic mechanisms that either resemble those commonly labelled rhetorical devices or tropes, or create an incongruity that diverts literal meaning in a very similar way to that of a common rhetorical device. A rhetorical device can be defined as a particular linguistic mechanism that manufactures a play on words to create a non-literal meaning. Rhetorical devices will create dramatic non-literal images with language that often, paradoxically, *add to the impression of truth in language.* Umberto Eco makes a similar observation. He hypothesises that in the structure of comic incongruity,

> there exists a rhetorical device, which concerns the figures of thought, in which, given a social or intertextual "frame" or scenario already known to the audience, you display the variation, without, however, making it explicit in discourse. (Eco, 1986: 272)[2]

Eco's comments isolate the mechanics of humour by describing that rhetorical devices, which are devices that are designed to render language *more* convincing, are necessary structuring tools in the comic. For Eco the 'frame' and its variation represent the two elements of discourse that are placed in the rhetorical device - this is the content. Importantly, an examination of comic techniques or structures highlights a marked similarity to rhetorical devices. Most commonly, the devices that structure humour resemble metaphor and metonym, but many others can be and are used.[3] Humour has, paradoxically, an implicit ability to have a rhetorical impact on truth impressions *because* of its structural incongruity, or lack of literal sense. It is important to clarify

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[2] These comments form a part of a discussion on the differences between comedy and tragedy. Eco suggests, in defining the nature of comic incongruity, that a violated rule or transgression is explicitly stated in tragedy whereas it is not in comedy. The applicability of this to instances of everyday humour is obscure, and an alternative method of defining what constitutes humorous incongruity will be mentioned shortly. While Eco outlines the structure of incongruity, the distinction between types of incongruity needs to be given a specific sociological framing.

[3] Definitions of metaphor and metonym are best kept broad and simple. Metaphor is taken to mean a figure of speech that combines unconnected elements. Metonym is taken to mean a figure of speech that combines many images or objects. The general idea has some recurrence, for example, Freud suggests something similar with his observation of the techniques of 'condensation' and 'displacement' in jokes, which resemble metonym and metaphor respectively (Freud, 1991 [1905]; Berger, 1995). Condensation is, for Freud, the subsumption of many events or symbols under one object, and forms an unconscious method of disguise and expression. Displacement has a similar function but employs one object or event to symbolise another. Koestler (1949) also acknowledges the biosociative structure of metaphor (biosociation will be examined shortly), and Palmer (1987) presents a semiotic analysis of the similarity between humorous incongruity and metaphor.

that this would not just occur in the punchline of a joke, this effect will be created in any humorous incongruity, which would include jokes and non-linguistic humorous images.

This has implications for the analysis of racist humour. While the rhetorical effect of the racist joke is also conditioned by the position of the reader, because of the existence of such a device, it has a certain structural potential to create particular effects, which include the strengthening of racist 'truth', and as we shall see later, a variety of effects on racist ambivalence.

In other examples of incongruity theory there are further techniques that can be aligned with the comments on rhetoric to provide a wider typology of the effects of humour. Preceding Eco, the anthropologist William Fry (1963) gave a description of incongruity as an explicit-implicit reversal. This is important because it shows how humour can redefine reality. He argues:

> During the unfolding of humor, one is suddenly confronted by an *explicit-implicit reversal* when the punch line is delivered. The reversal helps distinguish humor from play, dreams, etc... But the reversal also has the unique effect of forcing upon the humour participants an internal *redefining of reality*. Inescapably the punch line combines communication and meta-communication. (Fry, 1963: 158 in Berger, 1998: 5. Emphasis added)

Fry's description of an explicit-implicit reversal (or humorous incongruity) shows that when successful, humour changes the expected meaning into something that is not present. Fry describes meta-communication as communication about communicating, or communication that is non-literal. The humorous utterance will contain an initial, literal discourse that works, Fry describes, as communication. It will present something that has a literal meaning, something that, in the incongruity of the joke, is transformed into a form of non-literal meta-communication. This implicit meaning is presented via a reversal or switch that refigures the meaning involved and which can redefine reality. Implicit in this idea is the acknowledgement that humour is able to alter, at some level, perceptions or impressions of sense. It therefore has, because of this explicit-implicit reversal, a certain structural, rhetorical potential to manipulate meaning that literal communication does not automatically possess. This observation has some similarity to Arthur Schopenhauer's comment that in humour, 'two or more real objects are thought through one concept, and the identity of the concept is transferred to the objects...' (1969: 59). Schopenhauer argued that while the objects may coexist, their meanings

have the potential to move around and change places. When applied to racist humour this will emphasise its power as a form of language that can bend truth.

Another important theoretical advance shows how humour merges very different elements. The philosopher Arthur Koestler, in his theory of 'bisociation', which discusses how disparate elements are combined in the creative process, also offers important information on the nature of incongruity:

> the three domains of artistic inspiration, scientific discovery and comic inventiveness - have a basic pattern in common: the *co-agitation* or shaking together of already existing but previously separate areas of knowledge, frames of perception or universes of discourse. (1967: 195. Emphasis added)

While Fry gives us the impression that the act of humour is an act of redefinition, Koestler's co-agitation or shaking together of discourse, knowledge and frames of perception - all of which are connected - explains that humour, like scientific and artistic creation, allows for the merging of separate elements. These elements may exist in contradiction, or importantly, with specific reference to racism, may represent ambivalent or ambiguous positions. It is proposed that humour is able, through its structural incongruity, to merge ambivalent discourses.

Koestler also adds that, '[t]he event (...), in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wave lengths, as it were' (Koestler, 1964: 35 in Attardo, 1994: 175. His omission). While this event or intersection is conditioned by the reception of the material, when successful, the site of incongruity will allow disparate elements to intersect and *coexist*. In relation to humour, Koestler's argument implies that two discourses, types of knowledge or frames of perception can intersect and co-agitate, and that while they may influence each other, their serious existence need not necessarily be threatened by the humorous event. Humour presents a type of gestalt shift where both discourses may exist without seriously challenging each other. This suggests that humour has the potential for a layering or combination of discursive positions and is fundamental for understanding the function of humour for allowing ambivalent or contradictory social discourses to receive rhetorical strengthening. Co-agitation will exist in all forms of humour, but in particular cases the effect is more significant. This is dependent on the discursive content of the humour and the type of 'co-agitator' used, and the perception or reading of the discourse.

So far I have shown the connection between humour and rhetoric, outlined its possible affect on perceptions of reality and introduced the concept of co-agitation. Next, I present some more elements in my typology of humorous semantic effects.

There are several theoretical branches in incongruity theory[4], but all describe, at some level, incongruity as a change of meaning or a semantic shift. The approach was developed by the Bologna School of Semiotics (Attardo, 1994: 177), who described incongruity through the tradition of Saussurian linguistics (Saussure, 1974). An earlier account also appears in Dorfles' description of the process:

> According to Dorfles, humor consists of a process of ostranenie (the Russian for, roughly, "alienation," "detachment," or "defamiliarisation") (Sklovskiy 1917) realised by a "shifting [lit: putting out of phase] of a *sign* (a word, an action) from its context" (Dorfles 1968: 101). Humor will be considered "a particular kind of message (...) that operates when in a determined communicative circumstance a (...) change of relationships between *the sign and its referent* is given" (Dorfles 1968: 102). The fact that a sign no longer refers to its 'natural' referent but to another "paradoxical" ... referent, gives a "negative," "paradoxical" value to the sign, and so its humorous effect (Dorfles 1968: 104). (Attardo, 1994: 176. Emphasis added.)[5]

As well as outlining the generic linguistic mechanisms involved in creating humour, or the site of co-agitation, Dorfles highlights the idea of a negative or paradoxical position emerging through humour, explained as *alienation, detachment* or *defamiliarisation* of the sign of the object of humour. In this case 'negative' refers to a meaning that exists in some degree of opposition to the original. Important is the use of 'alienation', which

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[4] One approach is the 'semantic script theory' of Victor Raskin (1985) and succeeding work by Salvadore Attardo (Attardo, 1994: 175). Raskin's semantic script theory describes incongruity as the product of a change from one joking script to another. While popular with some (e.g. Davies, 1996, 1998, 2004a, c2004b), I have not employed this theoretical repertoire. First, the literal image of a script does not expand well from joke analysis to describe all types of humour, especially non-linguistic humour. Second, the idea of incongruity as a change of script promotes an impression of narrative that not all humour possesses. Third, and most importantly, it is a branch of theory that has not developed critical accounts of humour. Appearing uncritically empiricist, it has actually encouraged a movement *away* from the analysis of stereotypes in humour. On this, Davies argues that through script theory, '[t]he analysis of jokes does not necessarily require us to consider stereotypes at all. A script is a script is a script' (1994: 374). This movement in Davies' work is built on the incorrect premise that because not all of the content of ethnic or race joking relates directly to serious stereotypes, the content of race and ethnic jokes should be described as an interchangeable ethnic 'script' even if it quite obviously depicts a stereotype. This develops from a selective reading of Raskin, who clearly states that ethnic scripts often, 'capture stereotypes, which are at best very crude approximations of reality' (1985: 180), and that, 'most of the ethnic humour is functionally deprecatory, or disparaging' (ibid). Overall, the positivist nature of the field lacks the critical capacity and inclination for evaluating the social impact of racist humour.

[5] In this quote Attardo's omissions appear as they do in his text, as: (...). Mine appear as: ... .

presents some explanation of how, because of the rhetorical incongruous structure of humour, the object of humour can be ridiculed in some instances. This reflects Henri Bergson's comment that 'the comic demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart' (1911: 11). It also adds to our understanding of how humour can be critiqued. Humour contains a structural reversal that makes ridicule frequently successful because the 'natural' value of the sign, to use Dorfles language, but which is more accurately described as the dominant or accepted meaning, is translated into a paradoxical, contrasting meaning. So, while the site of co-agitation separates the meaning of the object of humour from its original meaning and allows meanings to be layered together under a single sign, these meanings may become alienated from the original meaning because of the specific contrast or paradox that is established. In the case of racist humour, the self-identity (the signs) of a minority group (the referent) may be wrenched from each other and redefined with racist intent. When successful, this linguistic 'switch' has an instantaneous or automatic occurrence and so presents a very 'efficient' method of creating ridicule or insult. The paradox of the unserious nature of any meaning also absolves the joker of responsibility for both the natural racial meaning, which may, in some instances, also be derogatory, and the alienated meaning. This observation forms an important link between the structure of humour, its effects and the basis on which to establish critique.[6]

The 'shifting' of the sign outlined above has been conceptualised by others, outside of humour studies, as sign-slippage. While the approaches outlined are not as popular as Raskin's (1985) 'script theory', they do present important theoretical explanations for understanding how it is that humour generates ridicule. So far then, I have shown that humour is clearly structured using rhetorical devices and that from this, the processes of redefining reality, co-agitation and semantic alienation provide a typology of concepts for the analysis of racist humour.

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[6] De Sousa also suggests that there is a certain amount of alienation in the tendentious or phthonic joke. On the example of a rape joke he suggests, '[i]t also involves the presence of a characteristic mix of phthonic fear, identification and alienation. This combination makes it wrong to laugh, because it in effect involves an important variety of *emotional self-deception'* (ibid: 244). He argues 'certain forms of laughter may be wrong because they represent an act of harmful alienation founded on distortion or denial of an underlying identification' (de Sousa, 1987: 244). This is created from a denial of any underpinning identification to the expressed discourse (ibid: 244). He explains a 'right to laugh' can be assumed only if we are able to identify with the object of the joke (ibid: 243), therefore phthonic jokes create alienation because they could not be told successfully face-to-face with the object of humour. This discussion attempts to develop an ethics of laughter through a consideration of the joker's wider belief structure. While it describes how jokes reflect wider problematic discourses, it does not explain *how* jokes have a particular impact, or how they create semantic alienation.

Of course it would be absurd to suggest that it is simply the structure of a racist joke that causes offence. Its content also has a constitutive role in the process. At this point it is appropriate to signal reference to the semiotician Roland Barthes (1977a, 1977b, 1993). Although he did not provide a contribution to humour studies, Barthes explains the specific role of sign-slippage in the construction of ideology and myth. For ridicule or offence to be generated through humour a certain type of content, with particular serious meanings, is required inside a rhetorical device. It is possible to propose that, because the devices involved are identical, as myth is, for Barthes, created through devices such as metaphor and metonym, a Barthian reading would suggest that humour has the *active* potential to convey and construct racist meaning in a particularly effective manner. Importantly, what would make humour different from non-literal communication or usual ideological articulation is precisely that this active potential is structurally contained and forced in the single humorous utterance, which specifically contains connotation. This is of central importance to a critique of racist humour because it explains how it can help maintain racist ideology, but it also explains that the serious meanings have to be performative vis-à-vis the comic.

At this point an important caveat must be added to the incongruity discussion that connects the experience of incongruity with social experience and prevents the discussion from becoming tautological. Not all types of incongruity are humorous and neither are all types of sign-slippage, so in order to provide an effective analysis of incongruity it is necessary to explain why one type of incongruity might be humorous and another not.[7]

It is widely documented that while humour and laughter are said to occur in all societies, there exist myriad differences in joke subjects and content (Morreall 1987; Palmer, 1994; Critchley 2002; Billig, 2005a). People display vastly different preferences for humour; this is displayed socially and historically, both between societies and within societies. So when is one incongruity funny and another not? An answer to this question would also add to our understanding of why there are divergent reactions to racist humour.

An early resolution to the problem of incongruity was attempted by the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who suggested '[l]aughter naturally results only when consciousness

[7] Alexander Bain in *Emotions and the Will* articulated this criticism of incongruity theory in the development of his relief theory (Billig, 2005a: 96).

is unawares transferred from great things to small - only when there is what we may call a *descending incongruity'* (Spencer, 1864: 116 in Billig 2005: 99. Original emphasis). This, to me, does not overcome the problem because it simply describes the movement from a serious frame to a comic frame. For Spencer, 'great' is taken to imply the serious, grand or important while 'small' signifies the trivial, unthreatening or common. Koestler also attempts a resolution of the problem when he suggests, through a return to the superiority theory, that humorous bisociation differs from artistic or scientific bisociation because it contains a 'touch of the aggressive' (Koestler, 1964 in Parkin, 1997: 144). This attempt fails to describe all comic incongruity, as much humour is clearly not aggressive, nor does it properly describe artistic or scientific creation, which might equally be more aggressive, or dialectical, than some instances of humour. Koestler has been critiqued on this basis (Parkin, 1997: 144-6).

While the problem has not been suitably solved in humour studies, with Parkin suggesting that 'it may prove impossible in the long term to resolve' (ibid: 144), Critchley makes some comments that point towards its resolution. He suggests that, 'in order for the incongruity of the joke to be seen as such, there has to be a congruence between joke structure and social structure' (Critchley, 2002: 4), and that 'humour is local and a sense of humour is usually highly context-specific' (ibid: 67). These comments are not developed any further by Critchley, but it is evident that they point towards an account of the social context in which incongruity sits.[8]

In developing this idea, it is possible to suggest that humour is formed in the 'habitus', which - to link with Critchley's comment - is both a site of specificity, of locality and one that connects with, and is positioned in, social structure. It is a concept from the work of Pierre Bourdieu that describes the interaction between the social environment and the body. The habitus is generated socially but is simultaneously individual, a part of the environment and ingrained on the body, and can be defined as a set of '*dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes that are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'' (Thompson in Bourdieu, 1991: 12).[9]

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[8] Eco also suggests that '[t]he comic ... seems bound to its time, society, cultural anthropology' (1986: 269). Eco is referring to the content rather than the interaction of content and structure in the comic.

[9] Koestler also inadvertently, and in spite of his alignment with the superiority theory on this issue, suggests something similar. He argues that, 'the receptivity for various kinds of comic

The use of the habitus provides a method for explaining that humour is socially and historically situated, while maintaining a structured element inside that situatedness. Incongruities may differ, and jokes will be funny in one social setting for some and not others, but it is the particular relationship of the social setting and habitus to the content and structure of the joke that will create humour. This is something that needs to be analysed in particular situations, although it is possible to generate an allegorical rule and to suggest that humorous incongruity will push away from the habitus before returning to it, while other types of incongruity create a different form of habitus separation. Humour is therefore a type of incongruity that does not 'threaten' the existence of the habitus. This is reflected in Guthrie's comment in *A Theory of the Comic* (1903), Guthrie is said to have 'believed that amusement ensues in a disharmonious situation only if we are simultaneously assured that everything is "all right"' (Keith-Spiegel, 1972: 8). Humorous incongruity maintains a closeness to, or affirmation of, a habitus boundary because it returns to it.

I return to this point in my discussion of ambivalence at the end of the chapter, as ambivalence in the habitus has a key role to play in the formation of certain types of comic discourse. In relation to racist humour, humorousness will converge with, and be governed by, habitual discourse. Specifically, the habitus provides a concept that can articulate the analysis of humour preference and include a consideration of the effect of structural, individual, conscious and unconscious factors on this preference.

Incongruity theories have not been explicitly applied for a critique of racist humour, yet they offer much as a method for highlighting the rhetorical structure of humour. This in turn explains its ability to ridicule through creating alienation and to cause offence, to redefine reality and so support notions of truth, and to co-agitate disparate or contradictory discourses. All of which transforms incongruity theory into a vehicle that can question interpretations of humour as benign or positive.

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stimulus thus varies according to the audience's intellectual habitus, its dominant trends of association' (Koestler, 1949: 29). Of course Koestler was using a definition of habitus that predates the Bourdieuian adaptation and is closer to the Latin meaning of habitus as condition or habit, but the similarity between the ideas is striking. Gundelach (2000) has also employed the 'habitus', albeit in an undeveloped form, as a means of explaining the emergence of joking relationships between Scandinavian countries.

Relief Theories

The third theoretical trend in humour studies are the 'relief theories', which also provide important insight for building a critique of racist humour. Relief theory developed in the nineteenth century, after initial developments in the incongruity camp, and set out to explain how 'laughter results from a pleasant psychological shift' (Morreall, 1998: 39), so providing a sense of emotional relief. This sense of relief is usually explained as the result of observing an incongruity, but relief theory concentrates on the change of psychological or physiological state of those involved in laughing, rather than on the condition of the external stimulus. Notable contributors include George Santayana, Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain. Contemporary relief theory explains how laughter releases endorphins (Rainham, 2003), which provides the basis for humour being able to reduce stress (Lee and Kleiner, 2005), and assist in the healing process (Capple and Ziebland, 2004; Goodenough and Ford, 2005).

Relief theories have rarely developed critical accounts of humour. Often the relief of laughter is accepted as a benign or useful function. Little attention has been given to the types of tension that humour might dispel, of whether these tensions are justifiable, or ethically equivalent. Parkin presents a comment that is typical of this outlook: 'laughter... achieves nothing in itself other than a working off of excess energy which for obscure psychological reasons is catalysed by certain types of incongruity' (1997: 136). The question of whether the release of racial tension through humour is problematic has received little attention.

Not all relief theories are so uncritical. Sigmund Freud's (1991 [1905]) theory of joking offers a number of insights that aid a critique of racist humour. Freud argues that humour results from a nervous release of energy (Parkin, 1994: 139; Keith-Spiegel, 1972: 12), and that jokes often have a similar function to dreams or slips of the tongue because they represent the expression of repressed thoughts, or thoughts that are not socially acceptable as serious discourse. Freud distinguished between tendentious jokes and innocent jokes. Tendentious jokes are a mechanism for expelling tension through laughter that avoids the censorship of the super-ego, which can be equated with social censorship. The tendentious joke either expresses hostility, aggression or has a sexual content and so includes most jokes that generate insult. Innocent jokes are, for Freud, jokes or puns that do not insult, and are less purposeful.

For racist humour, it is the tendentious joke on which I concentrate. Palmer gives a useful, tripartite outline of the mechanisms involved in the telling of tendentious jokes:

> The moment a joke is told, Freud hypothesises, there are present in the mind a series of tendencies: 1 to do something that is the object of social disapprobation, e.g. insult somebody; 2 the repression of that tendency; 3 the pleasure specific to joking. (1994: 80)

Taking each of Palmer's points in turn, the racist joke, having a certain discursive content that if expressed seriously might become the focus of disapprobation, allows for an expression to avoid the same type of censure to which serious discourse is subjected because it is 'just a joke'. By avoiding this censure, racist jokes, through Freud's theory, may express socially undesirable thoughts in a non-serious realm and avoid the necessary display of 'guilt' generated by unacceptable serious communication.

The second point in Palmer's outline concerns the repression of this tendency. This can be conceptualised in two ways that aid my typology. First, in the reaction of those who find the joke funny and, second, through a consideration of the impact of the joke on the 'other'.

First, as jokes are not serious, and jokers often deny serious expression or intent, Freud considered there to be an element of self-denial in the tendentious joke, that the joke involves an act of self-deception by the joker (Keith-Spiegel, 1972: 13). Stott describes this: 'humour works because it appeals to unconscious thoughts that remain largely hidden in the majority of our social interactions' (2005: 138). Keith-Spiegel adds that humour might represent 'a camouflage which functions to deceive the superego temporarily as repressions are being suddenly released' (1972: 13). Thoughts that could not be expressed in serious communication appear in humour because the joke allows for the expression of a fantasy realm for the joker and audience who accept the joke. This leads, paradoxically, to a denial of the reality or seriousness of the expression at an internal, psychological level, as well as the social level outlined in point one.

Second, the tendentious joke can be seen as an expression of the unconscious because, through the process of creating humour that involves denial of any serious intent - which is often sincere on the part of the joker - there is an unconscious expression of, in the case of the racist joke, a discursive content in a specific rhetorical device. This can lead to a number of potential discursive and communicative effects

that are *not comic* for the object of the joke, and *not consciously observed* by the social actors involved in expressing or receiving the meanings of humour. An unconscious discursive expression is generated through the act of joking and this can lead to a problematic and non-humorous impact on the object of humour. Joking represents a type of rhetorical false consciousness for the joke teller, and audience who laugh, because they do not fully acknowledge the motivation for, and implications of, the rhetorical linguistic frame they are entering.

The third of Palmer's points, the pleasure of laughter, represents the relief that humour generates, as a result of the enjoyable psychological shift. Pleasure, for some, can be gained by making others uncomfortable, causing offence or degrading an 'other' who is not present. It would not be adequate to excuse the pleasure of joking as harmless simply because it is a pleasure, especially as it contains a sadistic element. The nervous release in racist humour is not beyond critique simply because it provides pleasure for the joker and receptive audience. It has been documented that hatred often involves pleasure. Billig explains how,

> Sartre, in *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* suggests that bigots take pleasure in 'the joy of hating' (1948: 21). He argued that anti-Semites find it 'amusing' to be anti-semitic (1948: 38). Although their opponents treat the issues involved as serious, the anti-Semites 'treat the matter as a joke', knowing that their beliefs are at root absurd (1948: 15). Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, suggests that the rantings of anti-Semites at fascist political meetings are nothing but 'organised laughter' (1997: 184). (Billig, 2001: 268)

The paradox of gaining pleasure from hating is an important observation for understanding racist humour. If hatred and pleasure are so closely associated, then a regular source of pleasure, such as humour and laughter, cannot be assumed to be positive or benign and needs to be viewed with critical awareness. Similarly, if there is an element of self-denial in the pleasure then the hatred is not fully admitted. This can be connected with the observation of the alienation of humour, which is created by the movement of meaning through incongruity, and suggests that to inflict this alienation often has a pleasurable effect on the joker and the receptive audience.

Contemporary applications of relief theory have been attempted. Boskin describes humour as a form of social communication and 'integrally connected to the cultural code of society' (1987: 254). He employs the superiority theory and draws on Freud's concept of the tendentious joke to discuss the destructive potential of humour. Freud's approach is also commensurate with an examination of the linguistic mechanisms of

humour. He developed an analysis described as 'joke-work', which 'resembles what today's analysts would call 'semiotics' or 'discourse analysis'' (Billig, 2005a: 151). We have also seen that his key analytical concepts, condensation and displacement, are rhetorical devices. Despite this, there *are* limitations for applying relief theory in my later chapters, because I examine humour as 'text'. In this thesis any comments on the release of joking remain hypothetical and theoretical because I undertake no empirical measurement of release from joking. This is a common problem, and overall in humour studies the collection of evidence of release remains difficult.

In one such theoretical example I show in Chapter Two how the process of gaining pleasure via release in racist joking is connected with the expression of what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'proteophobia' and 'proteophilia' - fear and adoration of multiform respectively - which are defined as tropes that emerge because of the tension created by the ambivalent 'other' in social space. Bauman describes how these processes 'recycle' ambivalence in social space. The proteophobic tension and proteophilic pleasure created by racial belief and racial hatred is expelled through humour, specifically through images of hatred and adoration of the ambivalent 'other'. This serves to remove ambivalence from racist discourse while coupled with the pleasure of release through humour.

Theoretical Developments

I now provide a brief example of how the three theories can be applied to a single joke:

> Q: Which sexual position produces the ugliest children?
> A: Ask a Muslim...!!

In this first example the racist humour is aimed at Muslims.[10] Superiority theory comes into play in the obvious ridicule of Muslims. To call a group of people 'ugly' is a clear example of ridicule, highlighting perfectly Aristotle's notion of the ridiculous as a 'species of the ugly'. Incongruity theory shows how the joke creates a metaphorical link between Muslims and ugliness. This is the rhetorical device of the joke that would create the sudden rhetorical effect in the correct habitus. Finally, relief theory highlights that the joke expresses a comment that might be unacceptable in serious communication, that might, as 'humour', deceive the joker and audience of their hidden

[10] A full discussion of the racialization of Muslims will appear in later chapters.

anti-Muslim racism, and also, will deceive the joker and audience of their expression of racist rhetoric. This example highlights that an interpretation of the joke using all of the three theories need not create confliction.

So far I have outlined how popular exculpatory and positive accounts of humour are inadequate for the analysis of racist humour. After this, a critique of racist humour is developed drawing on elements of the three theories of humour. These theoretical points are taken forward in the later chapters and specifically applied to examples of racist humour through a three stage methodological approach outlined next. This approach is, admittedly, in an emergent stage of development, as is the sociological critique of humour generally. My methodology constitutes a form of discourse analysis that allows for each theoretical part of the typology available for humour analysis to be applied to specific examples of racist humour. Lastly in the chapter, I explain the effect of rhetorical humorous devices on social ambivalence (including racist ambivalence), which provides a key link to the development of the argument in Chapter Two.

Towards a Rhetorical Analysis of Humour

As stated, this section outlines the method that I use for my analysis of the empirical material - the humour and jokes - that are the focus of this thesis. The race and ethnic humour that appears in the later chapters is subjected to a particular analysis that I use to identify how humour generates a variety of rhetorical effects, and how the elements of my typology come into play. In identifying these potential rhetorical effects, I will highlight the particular racist readings that have the potential to reinforce or redefine truth perceptions and have an influence on discursive ambivalence. This forms an adaptation of several pre-existing methodological approaches from studies of humour, all of which are types of semiology (e.g. Palmer, 1987; Berger, 1995a, 1998). It is, therefore, a method that approaches humour analysis as a form of deconstruction (Berger, 1998: 4-12). These sources have not received a great deal of attention in mainstream studies of humour, but a semiological analysis does offer a more sophisticated and specifically critical method than that developed by alternative approaches, especially by descendents of Raskin's 'script theory' (e.g. Raskin, 1984; Attardo, 1994; Davies, 1996, 1998a, 2002), and has the potential to sit well with the critical theory developed in wider semiology (e.g. Barthes, 1977a, 1977b, 1993; Derrida, 1990).

My approach shows some similarity with other studies. While some attention has been given in discourse analysis to accounts that explain how rhetorical devices often *surround* humour, little attention has been paid, at least in recent work, to the analysis of the rhetorical structure of jokes themselves. For example, Lockyer and Pickering (2001) give an analysis of how rhetorical devices are often used in the complaints regarding the offensiveness of jokes published in *Private Eye* magazine. Billig (2001) has outlined the use of rhetoric in the meta-discourses that excuse racist jokes on three Ku Klux Klan affiliated websites, and provides an account of how laughter and unlaughter (or not laughing) work rhetorically as social discipline (Billig, 2005a). My approach mirrors these in its concern to chart the emergence of types of rhetoric, but while these studies get quite close to the problem, neither of them hit the target that this thesis aims for, because neither suggest that jokes are rhetorical vehicles in and of themselves.

Insight that has been gained from studies that have examined the rhetorical structure of jokes has not been applied for the development of a critical analysis of particular types of humour. Berger (1995a, 1998) and Palmer (1987) provide two useful and important examples of theories of humour that highlight the identical nature of the structuring of humour and rhetorical devices. My particular methodology intersects between the two, between what might be described as Berger's 'broad' semiotic analysis and the 'narrow' approach developed by Palmer, but unlike either, mine is developed and deployed as a critical methodology.

Berger (1995a, 1998) explains the aim of his approach and how it differs from a wider rhetorical analysis. He states,

> My concern is not with the techniques that can be used to "persuade" people to believe something but the techniques that can be used to "persuade" people to laugh, or at least, to see or define some text or performance as humorous. (Berger, 1995a: 53)

These comments highlight the difference between Berger's approach and my own because I suggest that in most cases the techniques and structures of humour are identical to rhetorical devices, and that the act of laughing, the act rendering the joke funny, often also adds to the convincing or communicative nature of the humour - that it helps people to believe in something. This is then coupled with the various rhetorical methods of excusing meaning that are specific to humour.

Berger's broad analysis provides a list of forty-five comic techniques or structures that can generate laughter (ibid: 54 and Berger, 1998: 18. also see Appendix One), and suggests that one instance of humour might contain more than one of these techniques (Berger, 1998: 15). This list represents a useful typology of incongruities and I draw on and reference particular techniques from this list when it is necessary. While it is not a list of traditional rhetorical devices, some of the types or genres identified can be aligned with traditional devices.[11]

An example of the second, narrow rhetorical analysis of humour appears in Palmer (1987), who postulates a clear link between the structure of humour and metaphor (1987: 60-3), and uses this to present a detailed theoretical investigation of the nature of the comic. Palmer suggests, rightly, that metaphors and jokes are similar because they both use words in a 'deviant' or non-literal manner (ibid: 61). I wish to widen the analysis to include parallels between humorous structure and not just metaphor, but many more rhetorical devices. While Eco suggests that metaphor 'has served to indicate every rhetorical figure in general' (1984: 87), that all rhetorical devices can be linked to metaphor, it is not imprecise to widen my own methodological approach to describe how other tropes are used in the creation of humour. In fact, this will add to the precision of the analysis.[12]

Having signposted these two similar approaches, I now give more detail of my own method of analysis, which has three interlinked stages. In particular instances of humour a different one of the three stages may dominate, but all exist to some extent.

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[11] Importantly, it should not be assumed that these techniques automatically generate rhetorical effects. Often Berger's (1995) own analysis does appear to emphasise the structural techniques of humour, without adequate attention being given to the wider social or situational factors that create successful humour, or which generate rhetorical effects. Rather than viewing the structural techniques of humour as 'meaning conveyers', as the structural foundations involved in the creation of comic material, it is important to consider the wider significance of the discursive content that is used alongside a structure in humour. Berger's analysis does not do this adequately enough.

[12] Palmer asks what it is that makes an utterance comic rather than metaphoric. This is the issue, addressed previously, of how one incongruity comes to be funny while others do not. Palmer accounts for this difference by arguing that 'we know that what we see ... is funny in so far as it is simultaneously plausible and implausible, but more implausible than plausible' (Palmer, 1987: 56), whereas, he suggests, a metaphor would be more plausible than implausible. While Palmer's attempt at distinguishing between a metaphor and a joke is theoretically ambitious, and he does develop the notion of implausibility in relation to the ideological and social connotations of the language usage (ibid: 81), it is, ultimately, an account that contains the same tautological tendency exhibited by other explanations, because implausibility becomes a substitute for unserious, and plausible a substitute for serious.

First, my analysis outlines the discursive content of humour, which would involve an analysis of the particular linguistic signs that generate meaning in humour. In any semiology there are two interlinked considerations that need to be kept in mind when analysing content, which are just as salient in humour analysis. These are, firstly, the relationship between the specific signs and, secondly, a consideration of the narrative structure of the text. This twofold consideration is highlighted by Berger:

> Semiotics ask how meaning is generated in daily life and ... in any text. It seeks to answer this question by analyzing the signification found in a given text and by trying to elicit the polar oppositions (or sets of paired opposites) implicit in the work. It also seeks to understand the way the narrative functions (when there is one). These two operations involve investigating the paradigmatic (or oppositional) and the syntagmatic (or linear, narrative) aspects of the text. (Berger, 1998: 5)

The analysis of humour should be no different. One concern of this thesis is with the way in which humour affects ambivalence and how it serves an 'important' social function for race and ethnic discourses because of these effects. Such discourses generate ambivalence around the binary divisions of the text or 'paradigmatic oppositions' (ibid: 7). By investigating these paradigmatic elements, Berger suggests that we can uncover 'the latent content, what the joke "really" means' (ibid: 5). In the case of humour this is of vital importance because it is these oppositions, contradictions or incongruities that will become, in particular readings of humour, the focus of rhetorical effect. Berger's second point, on understanding the narrative or syntagmatic element of humour, is important because it is this narrative element that will often allow for, and develop, the presentation of an incongruity. Berger identifies, rightly, that it is in the punch line that a shift from the syntagmatic to the paradigmatic will take place - that the joke will move from its linear form to its disjointed rhetorical form (ibid: 59). Language will remain in a linear form up until the point that the elements are placed in the linguistic 'switch' or point of slippage. This gives me two methodological considerations when examining both Fry's 'redefinition of reality' and Koestler's 'co-agitation' in humour.

The second stage of my textual analysis identifies the connection between the particular sign content and wider race and ethnic discourses. In many cases these connections are quite obvious, but it is important to highlight the etymology of signs involved in humour, so as to gain a clear idea of the meanings being rhetorically strengthened. This stage is connected with an explanation of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, but it would place special emphasis on explaining the connotations that are

generated by the signs involved in the jokes (Palmer, 1987: 63). In other words, this stage explains what exactly, in terms of the meaning of the serious discourse, is to be rhetorically strengthened in the joke. Palmer argues it is always important to investigate 'the narrative flow of the text, which is a form of production following its own logic, and the discourses of the social structure which clearly have an existence... independent of comic texts' (ibid: 59-60). This gives some idea of what meanings are the subject of alienation in humour.

The third stage of the analysis outlines the particular structure of the humorous incongruity, identifying the rhetorical device that it is built on. While we saw, on the one hand, how Palmer suggests that metaphors and jokes are structurally identical (ibid: 63), and on the other hand, how Berger identifies forty-five humorous techniques, I do not present a definitive list of techniques. Despite this reticence, it is possible to acknowledge that there are a number of common devices that often appear in humour and which can be signposted. These include metaphor, metonym, paradox, sarcasm, innuendo, hyperbole and irony. Aside from these devices, it is probable that further investigation will uncover other devices (Berger, 1998: 17).

Berger gives some logistical tips for analysing joke structure. First, it is necessary to deconstruct humour into its basic elements by outlining which devices it contains. Second, it is necessary to rate the devices in order of 'importance' or 'impact' (ibid). Once the straightforward task of defining the basic elements is completed, ranking the importance of the rhetorical techniques will depend on measuring the potential impact that each of the devices could have in a particular reading, perhaps by estimating the 'veracity' of the potential effect. In terms of analysing the devices for rhetorical effect, it would be important to gauge how the elements of an incongruity 'build' the effect as the structure develops. On this, Jean Cohen offers an important comment:

> Every figure of speech requires a two-stage process of decoding, of which the first is the perception of anomaly and the second its correction, by the exploration of the paradigmatic field, the nexus of relationships, contiguity, etc., thanks to which a signified will be found which will give the statement an acceptable semantic interpretation. (Cohen, 1970: 22 in Palmer, 1987: 65)

The incongruity that is presented in the joke is offered correction in the unfolding logic of the absurd and following the correction, the anomaly or ambivalence that was necessary for the humour to begin no longer exists. Palmer explains this as the presence of syllogism in humour (the existence of two propositions). A joke will present a major premise and a minor premise in its structure and content (ibid: 42), and in all instances

the first premise (the major premise), will remain incoherent, but the joke will always offer the minor premise some resolution through the false logic that develops in it (ibid: 43). Returning to racist humour, it is this second false logic that may act as the point of rhetorical effect. The sudden break or slippage in the joke (or the peripeteia as Palmer describes it) occurs with the emergence of the false rhetorical impulse around this logic. When the false logic is a racist logic, a redefining of racist reality can take place.

Humour and Ambivalence

Throughout the chapter, I have stated that humour can impact on ambivalence. Before Chapter Two begins, where I state how humour specifically affects racist ambivalence, I give detail on what I mean by the notion of a generic impact on ambivalence.

I define an ambivalent discourse as one that co-exists with other discourses in the subject, group or society, and provides an incommensurable description of the same referent in comparison to the description offered by other discourses. This is quite similar to the definitions developed by Bauman (1991). My definition is extended to describe ambiguous discourses, which contain ambivalent elements that attempt, but struggle, to fix definitions of a referent. Finally, it also refers to discourses that display logical contradictions, and so explain the same referent in a contradictory way at different times.

Theories of humour have posited a link between the experience of ambivalence and anxiety and the experience of laughter (Berger, 1998: 73). These theories have developed as a subsection of incongruity theories, because ambivalent elements are experienced as a type of incongruity that cannot be reconciled literally. Keith-Spiegel outlines how ambivalence theories explain 'that laughter results when the individual simultaneously experiences incompatible emotion or feelings' (1972: 10). Ambivalence theories have a long history. In Plato's dialogue *Philebus,* 'the prototype of ambivalence theory emerged when Socrates taught Protarchus that laughter arises from the simultaneity of pleasure and pain resulting from envy and malice' (ibid: 10). It has also been suggested that a joke, through expressing ambivalence, can resemble a problem solving mechanism. Shillier elaborates on this: 'The comic feeling is a logical joy aroused by a sudden change in the configuration of a thought pattern of unstable structure, showing the double aspect of a moment in its dynamic duality' (Shillier, 1938: 234 in ibid: 12).

To illustrate how ambivalence is rhetorically affected by humour, I will draw on two specific examples from humour studies: Sullivan's (2000) discussion of social workers' use of gallows humour and Mulkay and Gilbert's (1982) analysis of jokes from the scientific community.

Sullivan's (2000) account records how some social workers use gallows humour with their colleagues when describing service users. Sullivan quotes one of her respondents:

> the whole purpose of that lunch meeting was to discuss in really intricate detail... all the terrible things that we would do to these children, and how much we disliked what we did... anybody listening in would have thought we were either psychotic or genocidal (2000: 48).

For the social workers, the humour process provides a means of expressing these attitudes. Sullivan describes this as a form of stress relief (ibid: 45), viewing the humour as a 'socially acceptable form of expression' (ibid: 49) of anti-social emotions. Although critical of the content of the jokes, Sullivan provides no analysis of the functional outcome of this type of stress relief, focusing on a negotiation of the use of humour as a coping strategy and the discriminatory nature of the humour.

More specifically, the article can be read to highlight an ambivalence in the humour. Sullivan outlines that: 'The process may act to disguise the incompatibility between the worker's derogatory thoughts and her social work values, making it difficult to *consciously* make the connection between gallows humour and discriminatory practice' (ibid: 49. Original emphasis). Reframing this discussion, it is possible to show how two ambivalent or incongruous discourses co-exist in this site of humorous co-agitation. The two discourses are, first, the 'social workers' values' and second, the 'derogatory thoughts'. The coexistence of these discourses is incongruous and incommensurable, and leaves the social worker in a state of ambivalence and anxiety. The use of humour as a co-agitator works to remove this ambivalence because it allows for the social and psychological expression of both discourses. Both discourses remain unchanged in this process, but through mobilising the rhetorical and incongruous structure of humour, the ambivalence can be momentarily expressed and the derogatory thoughts momentarily dispelled. Alongside this, the social workers are also able, in this tendentious humour, to gain pleasure through malicious laughter.

Mulkay and Gilbert (1982) give a clearer account of ambivalence resolution in a discussion of the humour employed by scientists. Two interpretative repertoires are used by their scientists. Interpretative repertoires 'are recurrently used systems of terms used for categorising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena [and] particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organised around specific metaphors and figures of speech' (Wetherell and Potter, 1987: 149). The scientist's repertoires are labelled the 'empiricist' and the 'contingent'. Mulkay and Gilbert draw on two examples, a proto-joke and an ironic journal article, and suggest that they 'grow out of a fundamental interpretative task which regularly confronts practising scientists - namely, that of reconciling the empiricist and contingent repertoires' (1982: 604). In the empiricist repertoire,

> genuine scientific knowledge is presented as being determined by the controlled, experimental revelation of 'the facts' about the natural world. The production of experimental facts is taken to follow from scientists' application of interpersonal procedural rules, and theoretical interpretation to derive unproblematically from the facts, as long as no personal judgements or social factors are allowed to influence scientists' judgements. (ibid: 589)

The contingent repertoire appears in informal contexts and 'treats action in science as much less uniform and scientific beliefs as much more open-ended. Emphasis is placed on the importance of personal commitment, intuition and practical skills' (ibid). When presenting their work, scientists do not use the contingent repertoire (ibid). Importantly, these two discourses exist in contradiction to one another and so provide examples of ambivalent discourse as defined at the beginning of the section.

Mulkay and Gilbert found that humour often combined the two discourses and had the ability to remove the ambivalence created by the two repertoires. They suggest that '[h]umour constructed by scientists for other scientists is very frequently accomplished by juxtaposing the empiricist and contingent repertoires' (ibid: 592). In the case of the ironic journal article this process is directly enacted by the expression of a disturbing reality:

> We can now see it as a strongly ironic text which is organised... to bring out the supposedly contingent character of many scientific knowledge-claims, and to reveal how scientists can employ the formal mode of discourse to attempt to hide this contingency. (ibid: 600)

The scientists used irony as a method of expressing and hiding the contradiction involved in their use of the contingent repertoire. Mulkay and Gilbert explain that 'when scientists use ironic forms to communicate with their colleagues, the

combination of divergent perspectives is largely hidden from view' (ibid: 602-3). The literal failing of their repertoires is circumvented. This reconciling constitutes the removal of ambivalence from the repertoires. Gilbert and Mulkay state this explicitly: 'We.. Identified certain possible recurrent organizational features of scientific humour, such as the sequencing of repertories and the use of primary repertoires *to resolve incongruity* (ibid: 606. emphasis added). This is one effect of humour on ambivalence. As the thesis develops others will be elicited, such as the highlighting of contradiction and tension, or the mediation of ambivalence.

In Mulkay and Gilbert's reading, incongruity is resolved through the use of humour. The discourses that construct types of truth and knowledge, or formal discourses, have contradictory characteristics in relation to the discourses that develop in everyday situations. These contradictions are presented or framed in the humorous realm and so appear simultaneously and paradoxically true and false. This allows for both discourses to co-agitate. The mechanism used is a rhetorical device, which allows for the abrasive reality of these coexisting repertoires to be redefined, if only momentarily. The momentary aspect of this process gives some explanation for Mulkay and Gilbert's observation of the reoccurring and popular nature of these particular joke contents. Humour can dissolve uncomfortable truths that would otherwise have important and disturbing consequences for serious discourse, but only for so long, thus reflecting Bergson's 'monetary anaesthesia'.

Such humour becomes funny for the scientist and the social worker because of the particular play of ambivalence in the specific habitus. Their funniness would elude many people outside of the setting, or might be interpreted differently. The particular clash of ambivalence in the habitus and the placement of these incongruous elements in various rhetorical devices allows for a resolution in humorous expression. If these discourses were not incongruous they would not be suitable for inclusion in humour and so there would simply be no joke to produce, yet they can only become incongruous in a particular habitus. In Chapter Two these ideas are applied directly to racist discourse via a critical reading of Bauman's theoretical ideas. This shows how humour is able to remove, in specific instances, some of the ambivalence of racism.

Conclusion

The chapter began with a critique of the exculpatory and positive approaches. I then examined the three theories of humour, the superiority theory, the incongruity theory and the relief theory. Each is relevant, not as a universal explanation of humour or laughter, but as an account that gives particular insights that develop a typology of theoretical processes for a critical analysis of humour. Humour and laughter have, historically, been viewed with suspicion because of their ability to generate ridicule. The structure of humour specifically encourages this because it is rhetorical. Other processes include the ability of humour to (1) redefine reality, (2) co-agitate disparate discourses and (3) create semantic alienation. All of these processes depend on humorous incongruity as a rhetorical device. I also show how there is an element of pleasure and self-denial specific to joking. Following this I integrate these ideas into a three stage 'rhetorical analysis' of humorous texts. This examines (1) discursive content, (2) discursive connotation, and (3) discursive/rhetorical structure. Lastly, I show that humour can affect ambivalent social discourses. These implications give weight to the argument that, in some instances, jokes are far more than just benign or positive utterances. Chapter Two outlines, principally through an examination of Zygmunt Bauman's work, the major forms of ambivalence central to the structuring of various forms of racism, which in later chapters are shown to be affected in racist humour. This gives a specific and original analysis of three types of racist humour, namely embodied racist joking, culturally racist joking and liquid racist joking. I synthesise Bauman's ideas with the theory outlined here and explain that, as humour can alter structural ambivalence that would otherwise cause anxiety or cognitive dilemmas for social actors, (which is why it is often labelled a coping strategy or a form of conflict management), these forms are commensurate with the types of ambivalence outlined by Bauman.

Chapter Two

Humour and Order-Building

Introduction

Chapter One outlined how humorous and non-humorous discourses relate to one another and gave a typology and methodology of the rhetorical potential of the humorous. The implications of this follow that in particular readings, and because of the rhetorical devices or co-agitators that form its structure, humour can have important implications for non-humorous discourse. This was described as the rhetorical resolution or dissipation of serious incongruity or ambivalence and the reinforcing of truth claims. The purpose of this chapter is to apply these ideas to racist humour, racist truth claims and racist ambivalence by making use of Zygmunt Bauman's thesis on modernity, the development of order-building systems and their hatred and production of ambivalence. Humour is shown to rhetorically act upon the ambivalences and truth claims of racist discourse.

Following Bauman's assertion that ambivalence is the 'alter ego' of language, modernity and the order-building processes involved in each, but also represents the most significant and problematic 'waste product' of these order-building processes (Bauman, 1991, 1993, 1998), this second chapter outlines three types of race discourse - biological, cultural and postmodern. I argue the case, developed sequentially and individually in the later chapters, that during particular readings humour has a significant role to play in expressing and rhetorically resolving the incongruity, ambiguity, ambivalence and incoherence that is produced by each of these discourses. Thus directly influencing the perceived truth of the discourses.

First, as a product of modernity, enlightenment and colonialism, race discourse reflects a particular set of ordering processes whose ambivalence is rhetorically affected in embodied racist humour. Second, and also in modernity, cultural racism is signalled as being affected through culturally racist humour. Third, postmodernity or liquid modernity, and what might be called the liquid racism that emerges in this social formation, are outlined and signalled as being connected to postmodern humour.

Humour is not the only technique that can affect ambivalence. Bauman (1993, 1995) himself conceptualises two techniques that perform this task, namely 'proteophobia' and 'proteophilia'. Proteophobia can be defined as fear or hatred of multiform and proteophilia as love or adoration of multiform. These techniques are also shown to appear both in, and as responses to, race and ethnic humour, thus connecting with humorous co-agitators to form increasingly robust rhetorical techniques for ambivalence processing.

Before this, however, it is necessary to outline Bauman's thesis on the emergence of ambivalence in language, to explain, first, the *scale* of the 'problem' of ambivalence, and second, *why* it is that ambivalence causes problems for discourse that call for the mobilisation of removal techniques. After this I make some observations on the relationship between the social actor and the experience of ambivalence. This second discussion situates the theoretical points made in the chapter firmly in the context of an interaction between the individual and society, through language and discourse.

Ambivalence and Language

Zygmunt Bauman (1991) postulates a central relationship between the onset of modernity, the development of order-building systems and the generation of ambivalence. For Bauman, ambivalence has a particular and formative appearance in modernity, but it is not specific to this period. He explains that semantic ambivalence may appear both anywhere and at any time during the use of language, because it is generated through one of the most common forms of language use, namely category formation (ibid). From this observation, Bauman argues that ambivalence constitutes 'a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregation) function that language is meant to perform' (ibid: 1). While ambivalence is potentially quite common, it is not the generic use of language to classify that principally concerns Bauman, rather his focus is specifically that of scientific and knowledge-building discourse and the use of language by such discourse to create classification, division and structure. Importantly, he suggests that ambivalence emerges as a *normal*, and moreover, *inevitable* product of these classificatory, definitional or structure building practices, and represents the product of an inevitable lack of precision that emerges through category formation (ibid: 7).

Ambivalence can be generated in several ways. First, through not categorising or *ignoring* certain objects. Once a category has been created, a content will be defined. The definition of a content will also, almost always, rely on objects that are not included inside the category, as an example of what is not a part of the definition. The imposition of a boundary between these objects will create, or at least emphasise, a distinction between the included and the excluded of a category. If the objects that are outside of a particular category remain undefined, then their existence may provoke ambivalence or anxiety. Second, ambivalence is generated through the *failure* of categories to describe correctly and so ambivalence will appear when linguistic definitions fail to map the objects of a category 'correctly'. For example, an object may fail to 'fit' a category completely, or may change and 'resist' a category. Third, ambivalence is generated through *inadequate* or limited knowledge collection and would surround an object that little is known about, if it has not been subjected to 'enough' mapping or categorisation.

Following Bauman's rationale, such failures in semantic precision create an 'outside' of discourse and knowledge and represent the inability of language to completely map or make sense of the world. To reiterate, ambivalence is specifically *created* by attempts to dissect, categorise and define the world and its objects. It is therefore a logical product of the linguistic process of categorisation, which always involves the imposition of boundaries that depend on a particular amount of detail of description, that can either be superseded, redescribed, or from which objects can 'slip' away. Categorisation, therefore, contains an inevitable and unconscious drive towards fragmentation (ibid: 12), which suggests that techniques, such as humour and joking, which are able to express ambivalence, may have a significant social function as a rhetorical device that can overcome these problems. One criticism that can be made of Bauman here is the rather undeveloped way in which he assumes that knowledge manufactures ambivalence, and the lack of differentiation between types of ambivalence. A part of the distinctions created in this thesis will describe how different types of race discourse produce specifically different problems that are addressed in humour. These include truth reinforcement, the assertion of binary distinctions, and various consequences for not just ambivalence but also incongruity, contradiction and incoherence. Bauman's overuse of the term 'ambivalence' as a concept serves to subsume the detail of these processes.

Ambivalence and the Social Actor

Before I progress any further with my description of the types of ambivalence that appear in the various social formations and styles of discourse under investigation, I give a conceptualisation of the social actor, of how the social actor experiences discourse and of how the social actor experiences ambivalence. This is significant as a means of grounding the thesis, to make it understandable and to express its relevance for those engaged in mapping and negotiating the implications of humour. It is also important because humour is an everyday semiotic expression that, if it is to have any rhetorical effect, must always be 'felt' or experienced in a semantic form by particular social actors. Jean Francois Lyotard conceptualises the experience of discourse by the social actor, which can be used to conceptualise the experience of comic meaning:

> A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations... a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent. (Lyotard, 1979: 15)

By describing the social actor as a 'nodal point' in discourse, Lyotard suggests that the social actor can take up the position of sender, addressee or referent in relation to discourse, as a node with some degree of control over the propagation of discursive meaning. In humour, this simply translates into an observation of the social actor as joker, audience, or 'referent' of the joke. Coupled with Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, introduced in Chapter One to describe the site in which the definition of the comic is formed, we can see that if the social actor acts as a node for comic discourse to move through, comic discourse will 'meet' the habitus within the social actor. This represents the site in which ambivalence is experienced. This ambivalence may exist either in a discourse, between a discourse and another discourse, or between the discourse and the habitus (which may also, but not always, be a discursive interaction).

This may seem obvious, but it is important to understanding that the generation of a rhetorical effect produced by humour will depend on the reading that the comic discourse receives in the habitus, as it passes through a social actor or nodal point. The success of ambivalence resolution through humour will therefore relate to the relationship of the ambivalence to the habitus, which is a highly complex, and a frequently unpredictable or unknowable discursive phenomena for the analyst.

Having suggested that for ambivalence to exist it will always be felt by a social actor, we might ask the questions: what is racist ambivalence? And, why does racist ambivalence need to be resolved? In dealing with the latter question first, some have argued, rather uncritically, that while racism contains ambivalence, it survives, or functions, perfectly well with this ambivalence. For example, Wieviorka (1997) suggests that racism is characterised by its ability to exist with internal ambivalence and that this does not lead to the collapse of racism. He argues, '[t]he specificity of racism is, indeed, its capacity to merge incoherent or heterogeneous affects in a singular hatred of the Other; of wanting, for example, to exploit this hatred and at the same time to eliminate it' (1997: 147). Racism does not just survive even though it contains ambivalence, nor is this the specificity of racism. Rather, the creation and removal of ambivalence is a dynamic process that is not specific to racism but is an important part of its constitution, and one that employs linguistic techniques that are common to many discourses. Race discourses are essentially order-building discourses, and because the ambivalence they produce exists in contradiction to the aims of the discourse, they contain a logical propensity to seek ambivalence removal. This is a logical propensity because the aims and content of the discourse are challenged as logically coherent by ambivalence, incoherence and cognitive failure.

Experiences and expressions of ambivalence by social actors in relation to racism have been documented in the social sciences. For example, in early research on the existence of the 'authoritarian personality' (Adorno et al., 1950), and later, in the analysis of conversation and social discourse (Billig et al., 1988: 106; Billig, 1982, 1985). Billig, in describing the earlier research, explains how Adorno et al. (1950) built on Fromm's psychological theorising to discover that the racist was often '[u]nable to handle ambivalence, [that] authoritarians need unambiguous truths and clearly demarcated hierarchies. They seek the security of a clear world-view in which evil 'others' can be hated and a pure 'us' loved' (Billig, 1995: 137). This highlights the racist urge to remove ambivalence. In later research, social actors have been recorded making contradictory or ambivalent comments about racism, race and ethnic groups, which provides important empirical evidence that social actors also do express, as well as experience, ambivalence in relation to race, ethnicity and racism. Although there is debate as to whether these expressions represent either a conscious and deliberate defence mechanism (e.g. Van Dijk, 1984), or 'actual' ambivalence for the social actor (e.g. Billig et al., 1988), there is, in the literature, increasing acknowledgement that this type of 'double-speak' represents a dilemmatic expression of contrasting positions. So for example, a social actor may express racism *and* values that exist in contradiction to

racism. While this research, at first glance, might seem to contradict the earlier work on authoritarian personalities and suggest that ambivalence may not need resolution, that it can simply 'exist', there is also evidence that techniques for resolving these ambivalences are used by such people. For example, Billig has outlined how social actors may employ prolepsis as a rhetorical device that allows for the expression of particular contradictory elements (Billig et al., 1988: 109; Billig, 1982; 1985). Prolepsis is the device of anticipating a future state or criticism of the argument. In this research it refers to the refutation of potential accusations of racism while simultaneously expressing racism. Such uses of prolepsis can be seen as functionally similar to humour and joking, because, as a rhetorical device, they make compatible or co-agitate disparate discursive elements. Likewise, if earlier findings by the Frankfurt School are taken as comments about discourse, and the pressures of discourse on the dilemmatic social actor, then this can be incorporated into the argument. This early work might equally be conceptualised as presenting a conception of the staunch racist, who could also face 'pressures' on their rigid belief system, which would also call on rhetorical devices.

Having seen that it is the social actor that experiences ambivalence and that this experience often needs and seeks resolution, next I outline Bauman's thesis on the rise of modernity and the generation of ambivalence in modernity, which provides a theoretical basis from which to assert the widespread appearance of ambivalence in society and to contemplate the extent to which humour might be mobilised as a device of resolution.

Modern Ambivalence

Before discussing the ambivalences of embodied and cultural racism, I outline some of Bauman's observations on the overarching characteristics of modernity, because these characteristics are reflected in the race and ethnic discourses, which are, principally, modern inventions. It is also necessary to provide some critique of his distinctions.

While Bauman's conceptualisation of the duration of modernity is purposely vague, the characteristics of modernity, its themes and trends, are clearly defined. He suggests that the central focus of the project of modernity was the creation of *order* and *order-building systems* (Bauman, 1991: 4), that modernity 'had an insatiable thirst for *legislating, defining norms, setting standards*; for beauty, goodness, truth, propriety,

usefulness and happiness' (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 73. Emphasis added). This order-building tendency relied on a stance towards the world that was predicated on the notions of control and mastery (Kellner, 1998: 74). Smith elaborates on this: 'Modernity sees the world as ever more explicable, predictable, controllable, manipulable and improvable as long as we do the work of getting enough knowledge and developing effective practices' (1998: 42). Other features of modernity that are often described as constitutive, such as capitalism, democracy or industrialisation, are, under Bauman's theory, subsumed as expressions of the tendency to create order (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 78).

Central to Bauman's description of modernity is the observation that because it is a period that saw an unprecedented development of order-building systems, in parallel to the process of linguistic categorisation that these order-building systems employ, it is also a period that displays a structural and logical propensity to fail in its ordering task. The result of this failure is conceptualised by Bauman as the creation of ambivalence - this is both the product and the problem of modernity, because, paradoxically, modernity could not stand ambivalence from its outset. He describes this metaphorically: 'if modernity is about the production of order then ambivalence is *the waste of modernity*' (Bauman, 1991: 15. Original emphasis). So for example, each of the practices mentioned in the quote at the top of the previous paragraph - *legislating, defining norms and setting standards* - also involve the creation of something that is 'outside' of the process, of a 'waste' product, which is, in these examples, the unlawful, the abnormal and the unsatisfactory. The 'outside' of each of these constructed categories represents, for Bauman, the emergence of ambivalence.

This leads to two critical revisions of Bauman. First, it is arguable that Bauman exaggerates the specificity of ambivalence in modernity, and that it is a more universal phenomenon. Second, Bauman has a tendency to overuse metaphorical rather than empirical examples. The first point can be accepted, but not overcome in this thesis, because I do not examine pre-modern humour. The second can be overcome through the use of specific empirical examples of humour to illustrate theoretical points, rather than metaphor. Hence, the thesis remains fairly literal in style throughout.

Returning to the central argument - on ambivalence - importantly, and rather disturbingly, when such processes are used to categorise people, it often leads to those that are considered to be ambivalent in a particular order-building system being defined

as 'strangers', 'outsiders' or 'aliens'. These groups come to represent the ambivalent 'other' of the order-building process (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 79).

While the production of ambivalence is an inherent feature of modernity, it is also, as long as order-building systems continue in their pursuit of order, a process that is unending. This is because the order-building systems, and their attempts at problem resolution, will often create new problems or ambivalences that will become the focus of further or new order-building processes. This is a process that can continue indefinitely (Bauman, 1991: 14). Bauman explains this:

> the fit between the conceptual grid (ordering always entails dividing and classifying) serving as the design for the future orderly reality, and the 'really existing reality' to be remade in the likeness of that grid, is seldom if ever perfect. For that reason, almost every ordering measure brings into being new ambiguities and ambivalences which call for further measures, the chase never ends. (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 79)

While the production of modern ambivalence appears to be both inevitable and unstoppable, it also has a number of specific consequences. Bauman explains that ambivalence may be experienced as a state of anxiety, as discomfort or as a threat. Ambivalence may provoke 'the feeling of indecision, undecidability, and... loss of control' (Bauman, 1991: 2). While Bauman's outline of the effects of ambivalence often remains both generic and metaphorical, it is possible to envisage how these effects might be generated by cognitive dilemmas for the social actor and how these cognitive dilemmas might create a desire to resolve ambivalence. Importantly, this anxiety, the 'after-effect' of order-building, appears in direct contradiction to the aims of both the linguistic and modern process - the aims of control and mastery - yet it is an inherent product of its functioning. In attempting to overcome this, the 'others', 'strangers' or 'outsiders' that become the 'off cuts' of category formation have this anxiety projected onto them. This has human consequences:

> as long as the urge to put paid to ambivalence guides collective and individual action, intolerance will follow – even if, ashamedly, it hides under the mask of tolerance (which often means that you are abominable, but I, being generous, shall let you live). (ibid: 8)

Returning specifically to the social functions of humour, it may seem risible - through an exculpatory or positive lens - that humour and joking might play a role in removing the key ambivalences of modernity. This seems too grand a task for humour, for such a marginal, under-theorised topic. Yet Bauman's ideas can be neatly synthesised with the theory outlined in Chapter One. I have explained that humour theories argue that humour can alter structural ambivalence that would otherwise cause

anxiety, indecision or confusion for social actors, which is why it is often labelled a coping strategy or a form of conflict management. Specific studies have shown how humour is able to resolve the incongruities (and ambivalence) of serious discourse in specific situations and these *are* commensurate with the types of ambivalence outlined by Bauman. Gilbert and Mulkay's examples from the scientific community are drawn from the discourses of typical scientific order-building systems (Mulkay and Gilbert, 1982). Bauman himself also provides evidence in support of the argument that ambivalence can be resolved by humour. He notes that Edmund Leach observed that the 'pun, obscenity, blasphemy, just like other, non-linguistic varieties of 'taboo', are symptoms of the incurable 'non-fit' between vocabulary with its delimited semantic fields and a not-so-discrete and neatly sliced reality' (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 80). While the pun is described as a symptom of 'non-fit', or ambivalence, this can be extended to include not just punning, but a whole variety of humorous techniques, of which puns are but one. Perhaps though, rather than humour being a symptom of non-fit, it is more accurately described as a palliative that acts to relieve the non-fit of semantic field and reality.

Added to this, we have seen that, in comparison to literal communication, humour is structurally distinct because it contains a rhetorical device that can, potentially, manipulate sense perceptions. Once the rhetorical structure of humour has been illuminated it seems incontestable that humour has the necessary features for helping to resolve ambivalence. If it is accepted that modern, order-building systems have an inherent and problematic tendency to produce ambivalence, social actors as nodal points in these discourses would certainly have a functional use for techniques, such as humour, which are able to express and resolve these ambivalences.

It also seems obvious that those defined as 'strangers', 'outsiders' or 'others' often become the referents of humour - this is clearly the case in racist and ethnic joking. They become the referents of humour because of the relationships of knowledge they invoke. Bauman describes how the '[t]he tropes of "the other of order" are: undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity, undecidability, [and] ambivalence' (Bauman, 1991: 7). These characteristics - the 'other of order' - come to signify the social actors who become objectified as 'others' by order-building systems. Importantly though, they are all, also, at one time or another, *necessary constituents* of humour. This is also a key point of expansion in my argument and divergence from Bauman's specific terminology. While Bauman describes each of these characteristics as synonymous with ambivalence - or

ambivalence as the dominant feature - humour will be seen to rhetorically affect all of these 'problems' when truth strengthening, and at particular points, terms other than ambivalence resolution best describe the processes at work in humour.

Something should also be said about the different effects that humorous co-agitation can have on ambivalence and other problems. Depending on the 'strength' of the factors identified in humour analysis, it is possible to suggest that, in humour, ambivalence might be expressed, it might be mediated, or it might be resolved. A rhetorical effect, the effect on ambivalence, is not a unitary occurrence. The varying effects - resolution, mediation and expression - are a manifestation of the varying readings that can be received and represent the specificity of these readings. In adding some explanation of each of these effects, we might see the resolution or removal of ambivalence as the most influential reading and the one that would have a greater impact on truth perceptions. This might represent a more 'successful' rhetorical impact because it leaves ambivalence to dissolve as it (re)affirms truth perceptions. The next step down would see ambivalence mediated. This might allow the incongruities to co-agitate without removing either of the elements, and so represents a less complete reading. The final effect, which is to express ambivalence, explains the ability of the comic to highlight where it is that ambivalence exists and represents a less active, more benign, reading of the comic.

Now I examine some of the ambivalences of racism in more detail. We have seen that modern order-building processes have a preoccupation for creating categories. In their simplest form these categories created *binary divisions*. As Bauman states, '[t]he central frame of both modern intellect and modern practice is opposition - more precisely, dichotomy' (ibid: 14). Such dichotomies are usually uneven, giving the 'illusion of symmetry' (ibid), but in all cases in these categories, '[b]oth sides depend on each other... The second side depends on the first for its contrived and enforced isolation. The first depends on the second for its self-assertion' (ibid). In the next two sections I outline a number of key dichotomies that construct race and ethnic discourse. Following the separation of racism into embodied and cultural types, I outline the dichotomies along which the ambivalences of each racism are created. These are presented and resolved in particular readings of racist humour.

Bauman argues that one of the central dichotomies of modern order-building processes is the construction of *civilisation* or *humanity* as existing in opposition to *nature* (ibid: 7 & 40). Inside this dichotomy, the natural comes to be seen as ambivalent, in opposition to the order of civilisation (ibid: 7). The civilisation/nature binary encouraged an approach to the natural that saw it become 'something to be *mastered, subordinated, remade* so that it can be readjusted to human needs' (ibid. Original emphasis). This represents the imposition of instrumental rationality onto the natural so it becomes the focus of 'civilised' and 'civilising' processes, and any non-fit that the natural object exhibits constitutes an ambivalence. Biological racism was centrally constructed around this dichotomy, which emerged from enlightenment and colonial race science, philosophy and anthropology. This now appears in embodied racist humour. Embodied racism is the term I use throughout to describe the contemporary remnants of biological racism and is a key example of a typically modern and ambivalent discourse.

Biological racism can be conceptualised as a racism that distinguishes between populations on the basis of biological, physical or phenotypical characteristics, with these characteristics forming a boundary between races. It is a discourse that focuses on the corporeality of the 'other', with the cognitive, behavioural and cultural characteristics of the 'other' being ascribed to this racial corporeality. Importantly though, it is also principally a discourse that constructs boundaries and places certain civilised bodies on the inside of favourable categories, and uncivilised 'others' on the outside. Embodied racism, its remaining trace elements, can be defined as racism that focuses on parts of the body, but does not necessarily reproduce the discourses of biological racism in their totality or severity.

Biological racism had a specific connection to the development of the concept of race, with some arguing that the two were synonymous.[13] Both biological racism and the notion of race are attributable to, and developed in, enlightenment philosophy - which is, arguably, an exemplar of an order-building discourse. Chukwudi Eze argues that enlightenment philosophy 'was instrumental in codifying and institutionalizing both scientific and popular European perceptions of the human race' (1997: 5). In race

[13] See, for example, Fields (1982) and Appiah (1986). Both argue that any use of race is problematic and strengthens its inherently racist meanings, and that the use of race in any context is a form of biological reductionism. A full discussion of race will appear in Chapter Three.

discourse, biological racism, and embodied racism, there are a number of key order-building categorisations that follow binary divisions, which are structured around the dichotomy of civilisation and nature. For example, Chukwudi Eze outlines this through highlighting an 'identifiable scientific and philosophical vocabulary: "race," "progress," "civilisation," "savagery," "nature," "bile", "phlogiston," etc. This vocabulary belongs to, and reveals, a larger world of analytical categories that exists as a universe of discourse, an intellectual world view...' (ibid: 7). Chukwudi Eze's outline of this vocabulary contains both of the poles in Bauman's civilisation/nature dichotomy. Each of the other characteristics mentioned also provoke binary divisions that define the 'other' in terms that are not 'good', not unambivalent and not belonging to the civilised or enlightened group of the European philosopher. These binary divisions often appeared as hierarchies in biological racism, with Europeans at the top of the hierarchy and non-Europeans at lower positions in this 'supposed human, rational and moral evolutionary capacity' (ibid: 5).

For examples of biologically racist studies, Brett St. Louis describes a broad range of philosophical studies that each positioned the enlightened group in opposition to a deficient 'other'. Examples include:

> Robert Knox's (1996) ethnological account of the degenerative effects of miscegenation; Hume's (1987) philosophical sketch of a hierarchical racial polygenesis; Kant's (1997) anthropological explanation of the moral and behavioural significance of human species racial variation; and Hegel's (1975) assertion of the geographical (read racial) sites of World History... (2005a: 117)[14]

Importantly, these discourses, or forms of knowledge creation, all fit the design of Bauman's description of modern, order-building discourses, whose perpetual pursuit of knowledge through category creation leads to the creation of ambivalence. In this case, the emergence of ambivalence in these race discourses is ostensibly highlighted by the internal debates and differences among Enlightenment thinkers, as not all simply created uncritical race hierarchies or agreed with the hierarchies of others (Chukwudi Eze, 1997: 6), but it is also signified by their very creation of the 'other'.

Aside from its roots in the enlightenment, biological racism has also been described as specifically colonial in origin, as a pervasive ideological task preformed by the

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[14] These hierarchies have also appeared in theories of humour as propositions for the explanation of supposed differences in the use and value of the different types of humour by different groups. For example, James Sully suggested that humour 'improves as we pass from the lowest and most degraded to the higher of savage tribes' (Sully 1902: 251, cited in Billig, 2005: 106).

coloniser involving the categorisation and classification of the 'other' that had been discovered (Fanon, 1967: 31-2; Miles, 1991: 62). Some have argued that the process of colonialism had a distinct impact on the content of race categories. For example, Grosfoguel suggests '[r]acial categories are built in relation to colonial histories' (2004: 326). Others, such as Banton, have suggested that race ideologies were not caused by colonialism, and that race typologies emerged at an earlier point (Banton, 2005: 468). To circumvent these debates, it can be assumed that colonialism certainly encouraged a *preoccupation* with race. This preoccupation also created a number of binary divisions that were structurally prone to encourage the production of not just ambivalence but also anxiety. The first can be construed as the dichotomy of *civilisation* and *savagery.* This distinctly colonial dichotomy encouraged savagery to 'be physically located outside of Europe, outside of light, so that Africa, for example, was considered the Dark Continent' (Chukwudi Eze, 1997: 5).

A second colonial dichotomy would develop around the usefulness of the body of the 'other', as slave or as worker - between *usefulness* and *indolence* - which sought to put the 'other' to work. Bauman mentions this impression of indolence: 'creatures of bizarre skin colour, bodily shape or behaviour, engaged in practices that make "no sense" - whose presence "may serve no useful purpose"' (1991: 40). This second dichotomy, which subjected the 'other' to the task of becoming useful, also creates a situation for anxiety. In Chapter Three we will see how both the anxiety associated with the savagery and indolence of the 'other' emerges in specific embodied racist jokes.

Alongside enlightenment philosophy and colonialism, a third area of focus are modernity's race sciences, which also created and perpetuated dichotomies between the corporeality of the 'other' and the 'civilised'. Race science came to focus on the 'other' as representative of *degeneration* and the 'self' as representative of *purity,* which encouraged and excused the manipulation of the degenerative 'other'. An ostensive expression of this tendency appeared in the race science of Nazi Germany which, Bauman describes, saw the Jews as 'ambivalence incarnate' (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 80). Despite this, Bauman is keen to point out how race science was neither original nor specific to Nazi Germany, but represented a direct expression of modernity's order-building tendency (Bauman, 1991: 41). He explains that,

> the essential ideas of 'racial stock' and eugenics (race-improving) policies were invented, acquired scientific credentials and received public acclaim far outside German borders; that they had been implemented, with ardour, long before the Nazis came to power (notably in the USA), and long after ... (notably in all

> Scandinavian countries, under the supervision of social-democratic governments). (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 86)

Bauman (1989) argues that the holocaust represented the 'logical' and conclusive modern strategy for removing the ambivalent 'other'. While a huge difference exists between the genocide of the Nazis and racist humour, importantly, genocide is, for Bauman, a process of ambivalence removal. Bauman also argues that banal forms of ambivalence removal exist, and I show that humour is one. The same genocidal themes will often appear in humour, because racism, ideas of racial purity and degeneration, in their many forms, will also demand other more banal, acceptable, less extreme, or more day-to-day methods of ambivalence removal. Thus, in linking with the typology of Chapter One, racist reality can be 'redefined' in humour through the fantasy of extermination.

While the above dichotomies emerged some time ago, there are also a number of later, more contemporary ambivalences that embodied racist humour can help to resolve. There now exists a general consensus in academia that race is of no conceptual value as a means of phenotypic or biological description. This is often attributed to its association with the failed philosophy, science and the fascist ideology mentioned above (Miles, 1982, 1991, 1993; Fenton, 1999), which is now seen as unacceptable biological racism. Despite this, race is a normal explanatory term in commonsense or everyday discourse and so used 'unproblematically' in a variety of social fields outside of academia. Most people using the term race have a limited awareness of such academic debates, allowing race to form a 'legitimate' or understood means of distinguishing between populations. In these social fields, the ambiguities of race as a category-forming discourse will cause problems that also follow the concept into racism. These ambivalences focus on the dichotomies of *acceptability* and *unacceptability* of expression and on the *representation* and *incomprehension* of social reality by the social actor.

To return to humour, in Chapter Three the dichotomies mentioned in this section will be highlighted in embodied racist joking. I provide an analysis of how humour expresses the typology of processes outlined in Chapter One. For example, I show how humour works specifically to co-agitate the disparate elements of these dichotomies, and in particular readings, rhetorically resolve ambivalence and strengthen the truth claims of the discourse. This co-agitation will mutate the rules of order-building, and by presenting the dichotomies in a linguistic frame with a different logic, provide a temporary anaesthetic from the pressures of order-building. Specifically, Chapter Three

outlines joking themes that focus on intelligence and stupidity, corporeality and athleticism, corporeality and sexuality, and an assortment of metaphorical depictions of bodily decay and disease in relation to the 'other'. These examples are drawn from jokes in British stand-up comedy and jokes that thrive on American internet sites. These are two separate sites that reproduce themes from biological racism in embodied racist joking. In the internet based jokes, the unacceptable and ambivalent urges of modern embodied racism appear in embodied racist humour that has a specific connection to the history of slavery and race relations in the context of the United States. On these internet sites, joking, unfettered by censorship, represents the expression of a form of repressed racism that, in other situations, is the subject of social disapprobation.

Ambivalence and Culturally Racist Humour

'Cultural racism' is often said to have developed in the post-colonial period of modernity. This is also a racism that generates ambivalence because the discourse contains a number of key dichotomies. The major ambivalences that are produced by the discourse are outlined here and then, in Chapter Four, I highlight how humour is once again employed in an attempt to rhetorically assist the discourse. This is achieved by drawing on specific examples from British stand-up comedy, specifically comedians such as Jim Bowen, Jim Davidson, Jimmy Jones, Bernard Manning and Mike Reid, and occasional internet sources.

While I show that embodied racism allowed the colonised and enslaved, or the objects of racial order-building systems, to be viewed as beings that existed in a land of nothingness, this presents a clear distinction with the various sociological definitions of cultural racism, which has been documented as appearing in the post-colonial period and is primarily concerned with the 'somethingness' of cultural difference that is confronted in the 'home' territory. Cultural racism is a racism that moves from 'gazing' at and categorising the distant 'other' towards categorising the space that the 'other' and her culture 'use up'. Although there are numerous sociological definitions of cultural racism,[15] it can, for the sake of brevity, be defined as a racism that is constructed with the use of referents of cultural difference rather than, or building on, embodied race

[15] The number of names that are used to describe cultural racism highlights the various sociological definitions that exist. While often labelled 'cultural', it is also a racism that has been labelled 'differentialist', 'neo' or 'new' (Wieviorka, 1997: 141). More detail of these debates and differences will be provided in the analysis of culturally racist humour in Chapter Four.

difference, and expresses the urge to keep cultures apart (Bauman, 1997a: 55-6). It may then, but certainly not in all examples, represent an acceptance of the existence or presence of the culture of the 'other', as long as the 'other' stays in her correct place. Bauman describes an opinion that can be termed culturally racist:

> different cultures produce their members in different shapes and colours – and *this is good.* Thou shalt not join together what culture, in its wisdom, set apart. Let us, rather, help culture – any culture – to go its own separate, and better, inimitable way. (ibid: 56)

Sociologists have suggested that, in some cases, biological racism pre-exists and leads to the emergence of cultural racism (Fanon, 1967: 32-3; Modood, 1997: 155). In discussing the particularity of this emergence, Barker (1981) has suggested that 'new' racism appeared as a result of Conservative Party policy in the mid 1970s. Others have argued that neo racism is far more extensive, or that it is a 'racism in the era of decolonisation' (Balibar cited in Modood, 1997: 154-5), and represents a movement from pre-war scientific racism to post-war cultural forms (Gilroy, 1993: 44). Some go further still, and argue that cultural racism is at least as old as biological racism and as old as immigration itself (Modood, 1997: 155). More detail will be provided on these debates in Chapter Four, although in evaluating the appearance in humour, an exact dating of cultural racism is unnecessary.

Coupled with these debates, it is often asserted that the groups attacked by the two racisms are often distinct. Modood (1997: 156-60) describes how different racisms tend to affect different ethnic groups and suggests that colour racism, is often, in the British context, aimed at black or Afro-Caribbean ethnic groups, whereas cultural racism tends to attack British Asians. In Chapters Three and Four we will see how cultural racism is often expressed towards British Asians in the British stand-up tradition, but also attacks black and Afro-Caribbean groups.

In outlining the key ambivalences of cultural racism, there are three important themes that can be elicited if it is accepted that the discourse became more dominant in the post-colonial, post 1945 period.[16] First, there is a theme associated with the

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[16] Outside of the mainly theoretical sociological debates mentioned above (e.g. Barker, 1981; Balibar, 1991; Gilroy, 1993; Modood, 1997), there is also empirical evidence of a change in styles of racist expression. For example, Billig et al. (1988) note that, '[i]nvestigators such as McConahay and Sears claim that this outwardly 'reasonable' expression of racism is basically a modern, post-1960s development' (Billig et al., 1988: 107). These 'reasonable' types of racism can be subsumed under the 'differentialist' label.

increasing unacceptability of embodied racism as a mode of expression and the status of cultural racism in relation to this. Second, because of the increased presence of the 'other' in the 'home' territory, which was elicited by the onset of the post-colonial period and the growth of globalisation (Bauman, 1993, 1998b), there is a theme of ambivalence that focuses on the dichotomy that conceptualises the 'other' as either *'alien'* or *'neighbour'* and seeks to inferiorize. Third, there exists an exclusionary theme that focuses on *national identity* and *boundary crossing.*

Taking the first, I mentioned previously that users of embodied racism are frequently faced with the 'problem' of *acceptability* and *unacceptability* in their use of language, which humour can specifically help to avoid, by presenting meaning in a non-serious context. This is also a challenge that faces the cultural racist, but it is a 'problem' that is more nuanced and layered, because, as a cultural mode of expression, users of cultural racism often attempt to claim not to be racist because their repertoire does not use specific race terminology (Barker, 1981: Chapter Two). Therefore, one of the ambiguities that will be expressed by culturally racist humour is a negotiation of whether or not the language is racist. Discussions of whether or not cultural racism is racist will specifically enter humour, which will simultaneously provide further semantic defence layers. The processes outlined in Chapter One, such as 'redefining reality', are mobilised for this cause.

On the second point - of the increased presence of the 'other' in the home territory - an increase in what Bauman described as the presence of the 'other' or 'vagabond' (Bauman, 1997b; 1998b), give the objects of racism an increasingly local presence and a target for inferiorization. Bauman (1993) describes how:

> Once a temporary irritant, the strangehood has become a permanent condition. The problem of modern society is not how to eliminate strangers, but how to live in their constant company - that is, under the condition of cognitive paucity, indetermination and uncertainty. (Bauman, 1993: 159)

Bauman is outlining an ambivalence that centres on how to live with and know the 'other', and which relate to the alien/neighbour dichotomy. This develops because, as Bauman states, 'others' are constantly created by society, because there are 'advantages'[17] to this for capitalist society (ibid: 160). Alongside the tacit acceptance of

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[17] The inevitability of the presence of the stranger, the urge to remove the stranger, and the ambivalence of these positions, are for Bauman, central for the functioning of capitalist society. In drawing on Georg Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* he explains that strangers are essential for the 'correct' functioning of modern life (Bauman, 1993: 159). Simmel, in outlining the capitalist preference for strangers, points out that, '[t]he desirable party for financial transactions

the presence of the 'other' in society is the negotiation of cognitive paucity. An anxiety of ideas that surrounds the 'other' because of the lack of knowledge of her. This sets up a need to inferiorize, to overcome cognitive paucity. This is the urge to know (and assimilate or change) the 'other' - to remove its otherness - or the lack of knowledge. Bauman encapsulates this chain of ambivalence: 'The most striking and off-putting trait of strangers is that they are *neither* neighbours *nor* aliens. Or, rather - confusingly, disturbingly, terrifyingly - they are (or may be - who knows?) both' (1993: 153). One important point of divergence from Bauman's thesis is that these ambivalences exist alongside those of embodied racism - but in different discursive loci/forms - rather than being the specific and dominant racism of modernity. This is empirically substantiated in the later chapters.

The general ambivalence surrounding the presence of the culturally distinct 'other' in the 'home' territory is expressed through, or projected on to, a number of individual cultural characteristics as a form of *inferiorization*. A wide array of cultural characteristics form the content of cultural racism. Wieviorka outlines some of these:

> to speak of cultural racism is to insist on an image of racial difference which is not natural or biological but contained in language, religion, tradition, national origin; it is to stress the fact that for the racist, the culture of the Other, irreconcilable with his own, may constitute a threat to his cultural identity. (Wieviorka, 1997: 141-142)

Ambivalence can emerge around any of the characteristics mentioned, around language, religion, tradition and national origin (some of these are dealt with in Chapter Four). Jokes may express the urge to remove, 'accept' the presence of, or desire to know the 'other', which can translate into anxiety about any ostensive cultural difference.

Third, taking the example of nationality and national origin mentioned by Wieviorka, the third ambivalence and anxiety will develop in relation to *national identity* and *boundary maintenance,* and is an exclusionary logic, because the 'other' of cultural racism is involved in 'boundary ignoring' (Bauman, 1997a: 47). Bauman outlines this:

> the sight of people 'unlike us' flocking to join the nation reshaped into a state must have been worrying and off putting for the defenders of the national myth. People whose ancestors were not present at the mythical and invariable ancient birth of

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- in which, as it has been said quite correctly, business is business - is the person completely indifferent to us, engaged neither for us nor against us' (Simmel, 1978: 227 in ibid: 152-3). Following this, Bauman echoes the need for strangers in society: 'Were there no strangers, one may say, they would need to be invented... And they are - daily, and on a massive scale' (ibid: 160).

> the nation had no right to the insiders' status; were that status to be granted, the grounds for demanding unquestionable loyalty to the nation's heritage and destiny would be sapped. What can be freely chosen can also be freely abandoned. Nationalism was haunted by an endemic contradiction that could not but rebound in highly ambivalent policies towards the 'others inside', waiting to be projected on to the targets of those policies. (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 82)

When joking draws on the themes of nationalism, boundary crossing and the 'other', the humour focuses on the 'other' as an immigrant, illegal immigrant or asylum seeker. It is likely that a reading can be produced in humour that can, at least momentarily, place the 'other' on the correct side of the boundary, or at least co-agitate the problem. Humour can form what Billig describes as a 'banally mundane way' (1995: 96) of reproducing nationalism, but it is one that moves beyond simply reproducing representations, as it also has the potential to rhetorically strengthen the 'truth' of nationalism.

Reversed Race and Ethnic Discourses in Humour

This next section briefly outlines the presence of reversed comic discourses, which are primarily, but not always, articulated by minority comedians. These are analysed in Chapter Five. Reversed comic discourses can be defined as those that employ identical or similar sign-systems as embodied and culturally racist humour, but which do so with a reversed semantic focus. The extent to which these comedians employ identical sign-systems varies, in some cases including the employment of individual signs, in others collections of stereotypes.

It is important to consider the potential rhetorical effect of such discursive expressions, which leads to the consideration of a number of questions; do reversed discourses work to support the original racist discourse? Or, do reversed discourses produce new meanings? Is it possible for these discourses to be involved in both of these tasks simultaneously? Each of these questions involves a consideration of the influence of reversed discourses on the ambivalences of embodied and cultural racism, and on the experience of ambivalence by the 'other'. The analysis of humour in reversed discourses follows the same three stage methodology. First, the analysis of reversed comic discourses includes an analysis of the etymology of the sign-systems used in the discourse. Second, it requires an analysis of the intended meanings of the discourse. Third, it involves an identification of the rhetorical devices that structure humour. Added to this though, is a consideration of the polysemia of the discourse.

To consider the position of the social actor who is involved in articulating the reversed discourse, as a nodal point, is to consider the 'other' as the original referent of the discourse, rearticulating the discourse that describes her as 'other'. Bauman provides an impression of what the position of the 'other' might look like:

> The resulting void was an utterly unpleasant place to inhabit, but it also gave its residents a chance to see through what the others, the occupants of more benign and safer places, could not penetrate: to spot contingency beyond the no-appeal-allowed verdicts of fate, human choices beyond historical necessities - indeed, the liquidity of human condition beneath the thin crust of apparently solid institutions. (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 83)

Bauman positions the 'other' so as to allow for institutions, which would include the order-building discourses that construct ambivalence, to be viewed as contingent. This suggests that as discourses are not viewed as the unambivalent systems that they wish to be, the 'other' occupies an important site of resistance. In humour, the 'other' use of joking could be said to resemble what Mikhail Bakhtin described as an expression of the carnivalesque. Parkin outlines this: 'carnivalesque laughter involved an enormous release of tension and an aggressive denunciation of established ideas in an ambivalent matrix of praise and abuse which defied linear logic' (1997: 140). The humorous represents a chance for the 'other' to mock and resist the established order-systems. The overall potential of this is examined in Chapter Five.

The meanings that are generated by a comic expression are not fixed in a straightforward manner even though they draw on sign-systems that have a pre-existing meaning. Staying with the Bakhtinian circle, the work of Volosinov, and also, from outside of the circle, the work of Gramsci, emphasised, as Hall outlines, how their work introduced 'into the domain of ideology and language the notion of a "struggle over meaning" (which Volosinov substantiated theoretically with his argument about the multi-accentuality of the sign)' (1995: 358). The meanings of the reversed discourses of humour will constitute and construct such a 'struggle over meaning'; they will form sites of unsettled, but potential rhetorical, resistance to the embodied and culturally racist order-building systems - they will also present a struggle over ambivalence - but importantly, they contain the potential to rhetorically support embodied and cultural racism if divergent readings are produced. Hall explains this process:

> For if the social struggle in language could be conducted over the same sign, it follows that signs (and, by a further extension, whole chains of signifiers, whole discourses) could not be assigned, in a determined way, permanently to any one side in the struggle. (ibid: 359)

Importantly, this is not just a process of struggle over articulation that leads to disarticulation. Rather, it is a process that can end with the simultaneous articulation of meanings around the same sign, which creates a polysemic discourse. This type of struggle does not have to produce a 'winner'. Polyvocality will be created when the articulation of one meaning from one particular group is heard from a different semantic focus and is not automatically received with the preferred meaning. In a reversed discourse, it may be the case that in making this utterance, a comedian becomes a node in a polysemic discourse, as the discourse can be received in different ways. This leads to an aggravation of the humorous processes of redefining reality.

A part of the process of charting the meanings of reversed discourses will involve an examination of the responses to humour. The comedy may work rhetorically to disturb the meanings of racist discourses and so will form a perpetual source of ambivalence for these discourses, forming a semantic weapon in the struggle against racist order-building. There are also instances where reversed comic discourses support the original meanings, in these instances the aim of reversal fails. It is important to evaluate how far these reactions remove ambivalence and support pre-existing typologies and categorisations. In Chapter Five a number of reversed comic discourses will be examined. First, comedians will be examined in relation to their use of the sign-systems of the embodied racist comedy outlined in Chapter Three. This will include the comedy of Richard Pryor and Chris Rock and their respective attitude towards, and use of, the racist signifier 'nigger'. Second, in relation to British anti-Asian cultural racism, I will examine the emergence of similar sign-systems in, among others, the comedy of Omid Djalili and Shazia Mirza.

Responses to Ambivalence

It is now necessary to examine some concepts that are used in all of the later chapters. It has been argued that ambivalence and the related 'problems' are created in discourses that have a modernistic and order-building structure, which, paradoxically, seek to rid themselves of this ambivalence. Such discourses contain a tendency towards fragmentation because they are principally concerned with the 'carving out' of dichotomies from reality. I show that embodied and cultural racism both conform to this specific structural style. In this section I outline two of the key responses to ambivalence that are identified by Bauman - namely 'proteophobia' and 'proteophilia' -

and explain their character and how they work to resolve ambivalence. Proteophobia can be defined as fear or hatred of multiform, whereas proteophilia is the opposite tendency, adoration of multiform. I signal that humour can *combine* with proteophobia and proteophilia to provide increasingly vigorous resolution techniques.

Before I define proteophobia and proteophilia, showing how they work, it is necessary to outline Bauman's comments on 'social space', as social space provides the site in which the social actor, through discourse, enacts proteophobia and proteophilia.

Social Space

For Bauman, social space is not synonymous with physical space. While physical space can be reduced to pure quantity of space or distance between spaces, social space is generated through the meanings attached to a physical space, which produce the geography of the social world (Bauman, 1993: 145). Bauman describes three processes that act to define and demarcate social space, or three types of social spacing. These are the cognitive, the aesthetic and the moral (ibid: 145). Each type of spacing has its own products and each works very differently, but each involves the mapping of socio-geography and social objects that move into social space. Specifically, cognitive spacing is assembled intellectually and involves the creation of knowledge that is used to define the meaning of social spaces and the objects in them.[18] Aesthetic spacing is an affective process and involves mapping the experiential acuteness generated in a particular social space from enjoying the various objects that enter it. Finally, moral spacing has to do with the attachment to, or understood responsibility for the objects of a social space (ibid: 146). Nothing more will be said about moral spacing as, for Bauman, it is less problematic in its reaction to ambivalence and will actively dismantle cognitive space and fix or stabilize aesthetic spacings (ibid: 165 & 180).[19]

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[18] Bauman (1993) provides an illuminating metaphorical description of cognitive spacing. He suggests '[i]f cognitive space could be projected upon the city map, or upon the map of a country or the modern world as a whole, it would take the shape of an archipelago, rather than a circle or any other compact and continuous figure. For every resident of the modern world, social space is spattered over a vast sea of meaninglessness in the form of numerous larger and smaller blots of knowledge' (1993: 158).

[19] Bauman does not discuss the process of moral spacing as being aided by proteophobia, proteophilia or a similar concept. Moral spacing is fundamentally less problematic as it 'takes no notice of the rules that define the social/cognitive space' (1993: 165), and can disrupt it. Moral spacing also attacks aesthetic spacing because it will 'fix' objects in place instead of discarding them after use. Bauman states that 'the objects of moral spacing are the others we live *for*' (ibid. original emphasis), and 'they remain forever specific and irreplaceable; they are not specimens

Returning to cognitive and aesthetic spacings, if there are objects that exist in society that exhibit ambivalence, or cause problems for the dominant processes of categorising or enjoying objects in social space, certain strategies are employed to remedy this and resolve the ambivalence, because actors will always make use of 'an assortment of expedients' (ibid: 150) that aid its coherent reproduction. Bauman argues the 'stranger', 'outsider' or 'alien' will often disturb the categories that are used to construct cognitive and aesthetic social spacing - or make territorial incursions - and that these strategies are then mobilised to condense or remove the ambivalence, or more specifically remove the alien, be it either conceptually or physically (ibid: 168-74). Specifically, Bauman argues proteophobia removes ambiguity from cognitive spacing. The ambivalent outsider who does not fit the categories of cognitive spacing will be exiled because she disturbs these categories. In proteophilia, the ambivalent outsider will be drawn into the space, deified and consumed, but not known because no knowledge is collected of her, and then disposed of once her novelty or intensity has worn off (ibid: 168-9).

These types of social space appear in both modern and postmodern periods. While Bauman does not specify that a particular type of social space should be related to either modernity or postmodernity, I argue that one period might have a particular concern with either the cognitive, the aesthetic or the moral, and so an individual type of social spacing will be more prevalent. In this instance, the order-building discourses of modernity principally develop knowledge categories, and employ proteophobic responses towards cognitive ambivalence. In postmodernity, order-building discourses lose some of their hegemony, and so there is a greater variety of proteophobia and proteophilia in responses. I will now give more detail on the functioning of proteophobia for the ambivalence of cognitive spacing.

Proteophobia and Proteophilia in Humour

Proteophobia is defined as fear or hatred of multiform, as a reaction to difference that does not fit with the favoured categories of cognitive spacing. It will manifest socially as attempts to exclude the outsider, as a response to ambivalence that defies 'clarity-addicted knowledge, elide assignment and sap the familiar classificatory grids' (ibid: 164). In later chapters I show how, in modernistic humour, the 'other' of the joke is

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of categories' (ibid). Hence moral spacing has less pernicious consequences, makes less instrumental interpretations in defining social space, and negotiates rather than processes ambivalence (ibid: 181).

often described by stereotypes that have a configuration with Bauman's description of stereotypical classifications of the outsider. These responses are viewed in both embodied and culturally racist humour. Proteophobia often describes the outsider as being in opposition to rational, non-ambivalent characteristics:

> All traits ascribed to the outsiders signify ambivalence. Dirt is, as we know, a thing out of place, something which ought to stay elsewhere, lest it should blur the dimensions which ground the order of things... Unreliability means erratic behaviour which defies probabilities and makes calculation based on the knowledge of rules useless. Laziness stands for defying universality of routine and, by proxy, the very determined nature of the world. A similar semantic load is carried by other most common elements of the outsiders' stereotype: they are morally lax, sexually promiscuous, dishonest... overemotional and incapable of sober judgement – and altogether irregular and unpredictable... In other words, the outsiders are the gathering point for risks and fears which accompany cognitive spacing. (ibid: 162)

Proteophobia is a fascistic theme, it sees the 'other' as dirty, as an outsider, and wishes to expel the 'other' from social space because of this. With the help of proteophobia the ambivalence created by the presence of the 'other' inside the knowledge building categories of race and ethnic discourse can be resolved. Importantly, this is also a technique that can appear in humour, which places the proteophobic definition of the ambivalent 'other' inside a humorous co-agitator that will provide an additional semantic layer for an attempt at fixity.

In Chapter Three I show that jokes that contain proteophobia correspond to the second logic of racism outlined by Wieviorka (1995; 1997) - of exclusion or segregation - whereas the first logic, inferiorization or exploitation, is reflected in jokes that contain stereotypes. Hence, contradictory logics receive rhetorical strengthening in humour.

If it is in proteophobia that the ambivalent outsider is to be excluded or exiled to the periphery, proteophilia is the opposite tendency. This manifests as the urge to enjoy, consume or deify the outsider and can be defined as adoration of multiform. Bauman explains that '*proteophilia* prompts the efforts of aesthetic spacing' (1993: 168. Original emphasis); it is, therefore, a process of resolving ambivalence for aesthetic social spacing. Proteophilia involves gaining pleasure from observing a perspective of a stranger who is not a threat and so occurs in a well-policed social space where the ambivalent outsider is controlled and cannot influence existing social boundaries or create tension. Because of this, it relies on proteophobia, and the two work together (although this is not likely to be a conscious process for the social actors involved). A social space, Bauman explains, only becomes well-policed once cognitive spacings have

been well defined. Bauman describes this process by suggesting the proteophilic 'can go on drawing the strangers around into his private theatre without fear that those drawn inside will claim the rights of the insider' (ibid: 172). In this space the 'other' becomes the object of curiosity, arousal and enjoyment (ibid: 146).

While not appearing to be as obviously pernicious as proteophobia, proteophilia is problematic because the stranger can only transgress aesthetic spacings in play or in inconsequentiality (ibid: 168-169 & 172-173). It is always the novelty of the stranger that is consumed, rather than a more complete view of her, before she is discarded. It does not, therefore, represent a dialogic interaction with the 'other' and depends on proteophobia and cognitive spacing to set-up the conditions of its emergence.

While Bauman tends to describe proteophilia as a private process, as the 'task' or game of the urban stroller, I intend to use the concept as one that can explain socially shared and agreed upon reactions to the ambivalent 'other'. In a similar vein to proteophobia, proteophilia often appears in humour and as responses to it, which strengthens the rhetorical potential of the joke. These reactions tend to surface around the comedians engaged in reversed discourses, and so might impact on the sign-systems of embodied and cultural racism from inside instances of aesthetic spacing.

Theoretical Developments

I now present a number of critical amendments in my use of Bauman's concepts. First, I highlight another alteration in the terminology used in this thesis in comparison to that used by Bauman (1993). Bauman himself describes the *recycling* of the ambivalence of the 'other'. I have decided that a more accurate and less allegorical description is to suggest that the ambivalence of the 'other' is *resolved.* The term 'recycling of ambivalence' suggests that ambivalence is transformed into something else, or reused as ambivalence. I am, however, talking about linguistic meaning not material products, and so a literal description would see the processes more accurately described as the 'resolution of ambivalence', of putting ambivalence into categories, or more precisely, of shoring up 'truth'.

In providing some more detail on how exactly proteophobia and proteophilia function to resolve ambivalence - on the mechanism that is employed. Bauman explains both processes as a form of projection:

> The 'solution' of ambivalence, that condition admittedly without solution, is then desperately sought through projecting its inner incongruity upon a selected social target (that is, focusing the ambivalence which saturates the whole of social space on a selected sector of that space), and ongoing efforts to 'burn out' the germ of ambivalence in that effigy. (ibid: 160)

The psychological process of projection has been well documented (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2001 [1944]), but some types of projection are more likely to be successful than others. Although Bauman suggests that any solution is temporary, that ambivalence is overpowering, that, '[a]ll designation is, of course, a palliative, coming nowhere near the problem' (Bauman, 1993: 162), it would seem that even the temporary fixity of a concept like proteophobia or proteophilia would benefit from other types of semantic mechanism being involved and connected to the utterance. Bauman does not elaborate on these mechanisms. One answer to this problem is to conceptualise the reconceptualization of the ambivalent 'other' of proteophobia and proteophilia as specifically metaphorical in structure. Because it describes the 'other' through either images of fear and hatred, or images of adoration, both tropes draw on a semantic framework that is necessarily rhetorical, dualistic or *less ambivalent*, than the original, it therefore has greater 'appeal' and gains some purchase as a definition.

If other tropes can be employed alongside these tropes that also have the structural propensity to aid the process, or add additional rhetorical layers to it, then conceptualisations of the 'other' are likely to be more successful in their ability to stay fixed. When proteophobia and proteophilia are expressed in joking, the ambivalence can be resolved in a twofold manner. First, it is 'fixed' in a metaphorical definition at one or the other extremes of the binary. Second, the rhetorical device of the joke serves to reaffix the ambivalence through the success of the joke, which creates, theoretically at least, a more effective palliative.

Proteophobia and Proteophilia are conceptually similar to Goffman's ideas on individuals who become Stigmaphobic or Stigmaphilic in their reactions to deviance. Thus the originality of Bauman's ideas should not be exaggerated. Goffman (1963) shows how this is a response that does not consider the self of the deviant, and forms a reaction that concentrates on the aspect of the deviant's body or personality that provokes the deviant label. Bauman specifically locates the development of the concepts alongside Levi-Strauss' description of anthropophagic and anthropogenic reactions to strangers (Bauman, 1993; 2003). He describes the anthropophagic as ''eating the strangers up'. Either literally, in flesh – as in cannibalism allegedly practised by certain ancient tribes - or … as in the power-assisted cultural assimilation

practised almost universally by nation states' (2003: 136-7). Anthropogenic reactions are metaphorically similar to "vomiting the strangers'...rounding them up and expelling them... either from the realm of the state power or from the world of the living' (ibid: 137). I employ Bauman's ideas rather than any other because of their ease of applicability to contemporary societies (c.f. Levi Strauss) and the macro-sociological emphasis of the account (c.f. Goffman).

One further point of revision on Bauman's division of types of social spacing concerns the specificity of the ambivalence removal process for each type of social space, and the potential overlap of processes and spaces. So for example, could proteophobic exclusion not become an aesthetic enterprise? As, for example, in the case of certain 'others' being ugly, excluded objects while others are consumed? Likewise, knowledge collection need not always only exclude the ambivalent 'other' because of cognitive paucity. It might also love or admire a certain culture through studying it, and it might only collect positive knowledge that is enjoyed in an aesthetic manner. Therefore, I am careful throughout not to assume the relationship between a reaction to the 'other' and the type of social situation in which it occurs.

I now examine a very different social formation, namely postmodernity or liquid modernity, to examine the interplay of humour, ambivalence and rhetoric in this social formation.

Postmodern and Liquid Modern Ambivalence

This section examines a different mode of society, racism and humour, which appears in what Bauman describes first as 'postmodern society', and later, as 'liquid modern society' (Bauman, 2000a, 2003, 2005). Whichever label is used to describe this social formation, there is a significant increase in the 'amount' or the experience of ambivalence in it. This is reflected in the humorous products of these social formations, which I describe as postmodern humour. In this section, I signal, before describing fully in Chapter Six, that because the amount of ambivalence is significantly increased in postmodern humour, the functional effect of the rhetorical device becomes more 'strained' and complex, and the rhetoric more unstable and unpredictable. Therefore, multiple meanings are produced around the objects of postmodern humour. At a generic level, this makes the labelling and the evaluation of racist humour more complex

because there exists a number of semantic layers around postmodern humour, and so it will produce a variety of interpretations that have to be negotiated. Before an examination of this, I define what both postmodernity and liquid modernity mean.

Bauman (1992) describes the postmodern as having characteristics that make it significantly different to modernity, especially in relation to the voracity of social change and a diminishing potential for observation or classification of that change:

> It means the speed with which things change and the pace with which moods succeed each other so that they have no time to ossify into things. It means attention drawn in all directions at once so that it cannot stop on anything for long and nothing gets a really close look. (1992: p vii)

Another significant characteristic of postmodernity[20] as also characterised by Bauman is that it has a different relationship to ambivalence. In distinction to modernity, the onset of postmodernity sees an increase in 'polyvocality' (Bauman, 1998: 15, 2001: 84), which Bauman (1987) relates to changes in the status of expert authority. This increase in polyvocality leads to an 'unfinishability' in postmodernity, that 'the critical job has no limits and could never reach its terminal point' (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 75). It is, therefore, a form of society that cannot escape from the negotiation of ambivalence, it 'is the era of disembedding without re-embedding' (ibid: 89), in which ambivalence is constantly produced and hardly, if ever, resolved.

I now outline my stance on the relationship between modernity, postmodernity, the existence of each, and the styles of humour that dominate in each form of society. Bauman himself describes the postmodern perspective as a tendency that was always present in modernity. From the very start of modernity, postmodernity had represented 'its indispensable *alter ego:* that restless, perpetually dissentful voice...' (ibid: 75. Original emphasis). Likewise, despite society moving into liquid modernity, he insists the order-building tendencies of modernity reappear, so for example, '[w]e are as modern as ever, obsessively 'modernising' everything we can lay our hands on. A quandary, therefore: the same but different, discontinuity in continuity' (ibid: 97). Others suggest that the world can be conceptualised as being both modern and postmodern simultaneously, as various parts of society conform to different definitions

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[20] Bauman argues that 'postmodernity' should not be confused with the 'postmodernism': 'Unlike 'postmodernism', which, like all 'isms', referred to a programme or an attitude more than any particular features of the 'world out there', 'postmodernity' I hoped would refer to the quality of a particular type of society, which happened to be ours but unlike that of our fathers' (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 96). This is a distinction that I employ throughout. Postmodern humour refers to the humour of this social formation.

(e.g. Smith, 1998: 42). For Bauman, the postmodern, or liquid modern as he likes to describe it now, represents contemporary society (the postmodern has also been described as the 'liquid' stage of modernity, as a phase between modernity and liquid modernity [Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 89]). Liquid modernity is the term that Bauman uses instead of postmodernity in recent texts (Bauman, 2000a, 2003, 2005), although the two have a great deal in common. A part of Bauman's move towards the use of 'liquid modernity' occurred because of the confusion that exists over the meaning of the term 'postmodernity'. On this he proposes 'that because of the semantic confusion sensible discussion of contemporary trends under the rubric of 'postmodernity' would be well-nigh impossible' (Bauman in Bauman and Tester, 2001: 97). In defining liquid modernity, Bauman suggests the '"Liquid modern" is a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines' (Bauman, 2005: 1). It is, therefore, a society that has a similar relationship to ambivalence than that of postmodernity. Overall, I can see no substantive difference between Bauman's postmodernity and liquid modernity apart from the metaphorical potential of the term 'liquid' - which is unquestionably his dominant argumentative technique - and thus I maintain a use of postmodernity but draw on the notion of liquidity in social formations.

In understanding humour, an application of this conceptual framework would suggest that the trends in humour that exhibit modern tendencies and which work to dispel modern ambivalence, or the ambivalence of embodied racism, are somewhat older, or have a longer etymology, and exist because of the remnants of these discourses (however these remnants can be put to various uses in contemporary settings, even if these uses have been downsized). So while they may be put to use, their status and acceptability connects to the value that is placed on the serious discourse and may not have the polysemicity that postmodern humour develops, while the humour of cultural racism will fall somewhere between this. Despite these differences, all forms of humour exist in society at the same time.

Liquid Racism

I now discuss the effect of these changes on the appearance and structure of racism. I label the racism of postmodernity as 'liquid racism', rather than 'post-racism', because the term post-racism would imply that in this social formation we have moved beyond racism, that it no longer exists. The term 'liquid racism', on the other hand, gives the

impression that racism still exists, but that we are now faced with a racism whose structure has changed. In adapting Bauman's definition of postmodernity and liquid modernity for a definition of the racism that can appear in it, I define liquid racism as a racism that does not produce a monolithic reading as racism, but is experienced as racism in particular circumstances. Because of the 'volume' of sign-slippage in liquid racism, there is no straightforward way of establishing or asserting any semantic superiority of interpretation, and critique becomes more challenging. It therefore has a structure that is constructed with far more potential for ambivalence. More detail will be given on liquid racism in Chapter Six.

Bauman has described the meeting of strangers in liquid modernity as a mismeeting because the encounter has no past referent and no future expectations (Bauman, 1993, 2000a: 95). This becomes a relationship that exists without bonds but with a semantic void. It is this void that fuels the anxiety towards the 'other' as it represents the area of ambivalence. This is quite similar to the experience of the ambivalence surrounding cultural racism, because the view of the 'other' changes as society moves away from the fixity of modernity. Importantly this suggests liquid racism, a fluidity of interactions, is one within the home territory, or at least, inside the present territory of the social actor. Liquid racism is constructed through the referents of cultural racism and embodied racism, but the increased volume of the assemblage creates many more potential readings. It exists in an increased state of ambivalence of semantic expression. This would affect the definitions of the 'other' which 'are now as unsteady and protean as one's own identity; as poorly founded, as erratic and volatile' (Bauman, 1997a: 54).

The principle difference of this increase in ambivalence suggests that liquid racism may be difficult to define, or that its definition will shift. This does not mean that such formations are not felt by the social actor as racism, as older forms of racism are. In many instances, because of this structural ambivalence, its impact may not be taken seriously because it is not visible from certain perspectives, thus developing some immunity to criticism.

The discussion of liquid racism presents two questions: is liquid racism really a new racism or just older racisms hiding themselves better? If liquid racism is genuinely more open then the argument surely suggests itself that it is not racism at all, or is a weakened and challenged residue of racism? On the first point, I argue that liquid racism can use both embodied and culturally racist signs but that it is more ambiguous, containing more semantic layers. It is new in terms of structure but not new in terms of

content. On the second point, liquid racism should not be seen as a specifically weakened or challenged residue of racism but rather as an ambiguous form that is specifically *encouraged* nowadays and one that weakens various defences against claims of racism. To explain this more clearly, I describe liquid racism as a specific racism that is promoted and encouraged by the media. In Chapter Six, Ali G and Borat are presented as examples of characters that exhibit liquid racism, and in Chapter Seven, the Prophet Muhammad cartoons are also seen to have a 'liquid' dimension. They are ambiguous, but more importantly, this ambiguity has, in part, encouraged media interest. Put simply, in an age of interactive and polyvocal media, liquid racism generates a 'debate', providing more material because it is ambiguous. Traditional monosemic racism fails to provide this potential and so is less media friendly or malleable and less open to exploitation for media content. Liquid racism also leads to the specific staging of the proteophobic and proteophilic oppositions in media debate - and all social actors need do is take a side. Of course, it remains that many social actors do not 'read' liquid racism in this way, and so, and as is explained in Chapters Six and Seven, I argue it is as much reader interpretation and (lack of) reflexivity, as well as the expression of liquid racism, that is in need of critique.

Postmodern Humour

In applying these ideas to humour, in postmodern humour the interplay between ambivalence and rhetorical device is significantly different because of an increased generation of sign-slippage, which significantly curtails the removal of ambivalence, or actively creates more ambivalence. This has specific consequences when liquid racism appears in postmodern humour. Significantly, postmodern humour that contains reference to race and ethnicity sees a mixing of genres that makes ethical interpretation or evaluation quite difficult.

In particular readings of embodied and culturally racist humour, jokes can have a specific bearing on both serious discourse and the habitus - being to resolve ambiguity - that assists serious discourse in its self-maintenance and perpetuation, and facilitates the existence of contradictory discourse in the habitus. I suggested in Chapter One that sign-slippage is an essential trigger between incongruities in joke formation. In postmodern humour, processes of sign-slippage are multiplied which prevents a dominant interpretation from appearing. In these instances a strong rhetorical

interpretation cannot gain a foothold, or if it momentarily does it soon slips away under another meaning, as other meanings attempt to gain a similar foothold. Postmodern humour is therefore a quite different category of joking. When meaning in humour becomes saturated like this a situation is created where the potential for critique becomes more complicated because the experiences of 'concealed' racism become more likely.

In postmodern humour the saturation of slippages and meanings prevent a solid linkage of humorous and serious meaning. Any cumulative rhetorical effects created by a 'critical mass' of humour are unlikely to appear. This increased level of sign-slippage may disturb the rhetorical techniques that support the serious. This contrasts sharply with the humour of embodied and cultural racism, where it is the recurring similarity of meaning and relative stability of sign-slippage in a rhetorical device that can successfully resolve ambivalence, which reinforces these discourses. Because of this difference, any rhetorical meaning will only appear momentarily in postmodern humour.

Working through this problematic, Chapter Six outlines how racism can still be experienced in one or more of the layers or folds of the genre at the level of the habitus but is often constructed as one element of dichotomy in media debate. This is achieved primarily through an examination of the comedy of Sacha Baron Cohen, with specific reference to the characters Ali G and Borat, but also through a consideration of a number of other comic sources that have an affinity with this comedy. In Chapter Six I evaluate whether the saturation of meaning in postmodern humour produces a dominant interpretation, whether the humour can attach itself to, or support, a serious discourse in the same non-contradictory way that other humorous discourses do. In postmodern humour, meaning might be seen as far too saturated for 'true' meaning to develop and social actors may see more than one meaning. Some of the meanings may be racist and some not.

In the semantic field of postmodern humour, the reactions to humour and to the (even more) ambivalent 'other' of humour - which include proteophobia and proteophilia - may be more confused and confusing. As the amount of ambivalence increases around the referents of humour, proteophobia and proteophilia are, theoretically, more likely to be observed around the same humorous object. As the ambivalence of the 'other' of postmodern humour increases and expresses numerous race and ethnic signifiers, and invokes various habitus positions, so different social

actors can experience 'opposite' readings of the same ambivalent 'other', and both proteophobic and proteophilic responses are produced as a result. There is then an inability of the rhetorical structure to remove the ambivalence for any fixed period, so while an article of order-building may be modern in appearance and it may have originated in modernity, remnants of it may remain or even be replicated in postmodernity. Its status, however, will have changed.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained the central importance of the generation of ambivalence in the dominant societal formations of modernity and postmodernity, and linked to this, the impact on the race and ethnic discourses that appear in these periods. We have seen that ambivalence represents Zygmunt Bauman's 'alter ego' of language, or an unavoidable waste product that is inherent as the catalyst and the product of order-building systems. Ambivalence resolution can be conceptualised as a problem and demand that any linguistic, order-building process will be concerned with. In the proceeding chapters, these order-building processes will be shown to draw on humour as a rhetorical device that consumes the ambiguous waste of signification. As the 'alter ego' of the serious, humour is shown to be used as a mechanism for removing this semantic waste, and so specifically aiding serious discourse in its continued existence. I have therefore shown how Bauman's ideas on ambivalence can be combined with my typology of rhetorical humour processes, as outlined in Chapter One. This theory is applied in Chapter Three, with an analysis of embodied racism in humour.

Chapter Three

'Biological Racism' and Embodied Racist Humour

Introduction

This chapter applies the theoretical apparatus outlined in Chapters One and Two for an examination of the appearance of the remnants of biological racism in humour.[21] These are described as forms of 'embodied racism'. Embodied racism is a racism with an order-building and hierarchical propensity, and an invention of modernity alongside the development of race itself.

The central argument presented is that embodied racist humour often rhetorically supports racist truth claims and is used to express racist ambivalence and incongruity. When successful, these rhetorical expressions will serve the function of reinforcing embodied racist truth and removing the 'appearance' of ambivalence from both within embodied racism and between embodied racism and other competing or contradictory discourses outside of its boundaries. Therefore, the chapter analyses the interplay between the constitutive sign-systems and dichotomous stereotypes of embodied racism, and the rhetorical incongruous devices of humour, to show how this semantic combination supports racism through its rhetorical and communicative effect.

The chapter reiterates and expands on the definition of embodied racism presented in Chapter Two, by situating it in relation to, first, a usage of race that considers the ongoing sociological debates on its meaning and usefulness and second, linked arguments on the concept of racialization. Informed by the preceding discussions, the chapter highlights some examples of the sociological downgrading of embodied racism, before introducing its central dichotomy, which is created by the particular concepts of 'civilisation' and 'nature' and their associated connotations. It is then suggested that these elements are reproduced in embodied racist humour.

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[21] The methodology employed in this and the later chapters follows the form of the rhetorical analysis outlined in Chapter One. The jokes selected are taken from sources that follow or explicate the particular discursive frame under analysis, as embodied, cultural or liquid racism, and so are not easily or completely tied to particular social situations, but have a porous, discursive quality. In explicating these discursive trends, no attempt has been made to be quantitatively representative in relation to the occurrence of expressions of racist humour. This is beyond the scope of the thesis. Following this, the joke-by-joke analysis elicits theoretical observations, rather than an accurate survey of the available material.

Racist jokes do not always exhibit a direct expression of dichotomy. Such jokes do, however, maintain the ability to have rhetorical effects and may work implicitly on racist truth claims. The chapter gives some examples of non-ambivalent or *non-stereotyped* racist jokes with an outline of black and 'nigger' jokes. These form 'exemplary' embodied race signifiers that are expressed, and rhetorically effect racism, often without the *explicit* presence of the stereotypes or dichotomies of embodied racism. An analysis of these jokes is presented via a critique of Raskin's (1985) definition of the ethnic joke as that which *always* contains an ethnic script.

The final section examines three areas of embodied racism that appear in embodied racist humour, that develop as connotations of the aforementioned civilisation/nature dichotomy and depict black people in the main. To begin, I examine a mind/body dichotomy that shows black people as stupid. After this, I examine jokes that portray a dichotomy that depicts the sexuality of the black 'other' as savage and unrestrained. Third, in connection with the racist description of the increased corporeality of the black 'other', I examine jokes that depict the bodies of black people in certain types of social activity or habit. These include sport, crime and indolence. In the last three, jokes that contain both embodied and cultural racism are shown to be connected in theme or target (the issue of connection is given more attention below). Before that though, I say something about the separation of the jokes in the chapter in correspondence to Michel Wieviorka's dual logic of racism.

The Dual Logic of Racist Humour

Racist humour will often describe the 'other' as either lacking in 'worth', or, as something that should be removed from society. This, in essence, forms the 'rationale' of racist humour and corresponds to the logic of racism outlined by Michel Wieviorka, of consisting of paradoxical processes of inclusion, leading to inferiorization and exploitation, and exclusion, leading to segregation based on the observation of threat (Wieviorka, 1997: 141, also Wieviorka, 1995).

First, I split my selection of embodied racist jokes along this dichotomy. I show how inclusive jokes depict inferiorization and exploitation, particularly inferiorization through stereotyping. The particular dichotomies of embodied racism present images of inferiorization and correspond to the first half of the logic. The joke below is an example:

Q: What do you call a black guy with a fan?
A: Antique air conditioner
(BlackJokes.net, no date)

This joke, from a US website, inferiorizes through making reference to slavery, relying on a dichotomy of the master and the slave.

Second, the chapter identifies jokes that address what might be done with the 'other' - those that call for exclusion or destruction. Exclusionary jokes depict ways to get rid of the 'other', but do not always depict stereotypes. Here is an example:

Q: What do u call 1,000 black people on a plane back to Africa?
A: A good start
(ibid)

Exclusionary jokes often employ Bauman's 'proteophobic' trope and offer images of refuse categorisation or disposal (Bauman, 1993, 2003). To reiterate, proteophobia is a fear or hatred of multiform and a reaction to the 'other' who does not correspond to dominant styles of social spacing. Bauman argues it appears as an expression of the exclusion of the outsider, as a response to the 'other' who defies knowledge classification (1993: 164). This observation demonstrates how racist jokes, while containing specific signs and stereotypes - which present deficient characteristics in a rhetorical device - often explicitly exhibit an urge to destroy or dispose of the body of the 'other'. The themes of refuse can be divided into waste and excrement jokes, while the themes of disposal centre on expressions of expulsion, exclusion or death. Following Bauman's use of the concept, it is argued these proteophilic jokes form 'palliatives' for the second logic and appear in the various tropes of humour to present a second symbolic 'end' or means of resolving the 'problem' of ambivalence. These jokes appear more often in the non-stereotyped jokes identified in section two. In this chapter and the next, I sketch a typology of proteophobic joking that becomes both more severe and offensive. It is not unreasonable to infer that an increase in the severity of racist expression might require a parallel level of increased proteophobic expression, which works dynamically to accommodate the particular exclusionary needs of different social discourses and situations, or individuals and groups.[22]

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[22] While it is possible to observe the proteophobic tendency in embodied racist joking, Bauman's parallel technique for ambivalence disposal, proteophilia, is not observed in this type of racism. Proteophilia, or love of multiform, is not a method of ambivalence removal that is employed by the racist. As summarised in Chapter Two, both strategies exist in society but appear at very different points, and often, but not always, in relation to different positions on the political spectrum. Racist comedy and humour tends to fulfil the proteophobic urge.

Distinguishing Embodied Racist Humour

Chapter Two explained that biological racism was a racism that divided populations through the use of phenotypical, biological and physical traits, which led to the formation of racist boundaries between populations. It was a racism that placed a great emphasis on defining corporeality. From this, remnants of biological racism - embodied racism - emerged with an intrinsic developmental link to enlightenment philosophy, science and anthropology, which mapped hierarchal conceptualisations of racial groups. This section and the next extends the definition by situating the thesis in relation to the contemporary sociology of race and ethnicity, by outlining my specific use of the terms 'race' and 'racialization'. Both are shown to be relevant for the analysis of racist humour. I define embodied racism as racism that depicts racialized characteristics of the body of the 'other', but does not explicitly or implicitly include the systemic totality of older, often academic, forms of biological racism.

During the analysis I also evaluate the overall importance or relevance placed on the concept of embodied racism in contemporary sociology and make two observations. First, in current sociology there is an under-emphasis in describing the appearance and consequences of embodied racism, in favour of an overall exaggeration of cultural racism as the dominant form. Second, this under-emphasis has led to an analytical blind-spot that, in many cases, has failed to describe racism as not simply the interconnection of embodied and cultural racism, but as an internally muddled and erratic supply of ideas and practices. The depiction of racism in sociological typologies quite often adds an unrealistic amount of analytic clarity to, or ignores certain aspects of, this plethora. So in essence, the separation of Chapters Three and Four into the themes of embodied and cultural racism aims to reassert the importance of embodied racism. I reintroduce this aspect of the plethora and highlight its connection to, and contextual overlap with cultural racism, rather than exaggerate their distinctiveness or downplay the impact of one or the other racist form. I elicit these points through a discussion of the dominant positions in the sociology of race and ethnicity in relation to examples of racist humour. The comedians mentioned in this chapter and the next tell jokes that contain both embodied and cultural racism and, importantly, this occurs not just in the same performances but in the same jokes or sections of their acts, which suggests that the comedians conceptualise the material as a whole. Likewise, the internet based jokes also exhibit a mixture of types of racism.

The Realities of Race and Racialization

Embodied racism is tied up with concepts of race. Many have asserted or highlighted that a general consensus exists in sociology that sees the concept of race as having no conceptual value for phenotypical or biological description (e.g. Banton, 1995; Miles, 1982, 1991, 1993; Fenton, 1999; Spoonley, 1995). This, in part, is due to its association with racism and fascist ideology, and also because of its failed or anachronistic status in biological and genetic science - or its failure as an ontological category with any verifiable foundation. This leaves a reality of race that Sampson aptly describes: 'People make race. Differences in skin colour and other physical attributes exist, but on a spectrum rather than in neatly apportioned categories' (2005: 3).

Although the dominant sociological reading of race exists in marked contrast to early enlightenment theoretical readings, arguments over the usage of race, of what to do with the term, are by no means settled. St. Louis typologizes these positions:

> On the one hand, race *can* be identified as a *biological category* that distinguishes between population varieties in the human species... or as a *syncretic category* that is formed (and continually reformed) at particular socio-historical junctures... On the other hand, race *does not* exist in any real objective sense and instead is a *mythic category* that biologically misrepresents existing ethnic groups... or is a *reified category* that conjures the fictive biological, social and cultural unity of arbitrary racialized collectives. (2005b: 29. Original emphasis)

The various identifications of race continually resuscitate debate on how the concept should be used in the social sciences. Kim (2004) also crystallises the plethora of positions with a tripartite typology of users: first, *'anti-essentialists'* who argue that 'subordinated groups should stop using the concept' (2004: 338-39), second, *'strategic essentialists'* who 'retain and rehabilitate the concept of race in order to promote collective identity' (ibid: 339) and third, *'quasi-essentialists'* who prefer to challenge whiteness as a hegemonic category (ibid).

Both St. Louis' and Kim's typologies recreate the image presented by Gilroy in his early work, of race as a signifier whose 'meanings are unfixed and subject to the outcomes of struggle' (1987: 24) (which is noticeable both inside and outside of academia), or of the semantics of race as fitting Hall's 'floating signifier' (Hall, c1996), or Ruskin's 'empty signifier' (Ruskin, 1991). While all signs are more or less polysemic - can 'float' or be 'emptied' by different types of use - because of the

connection of race with racism, these struggles have a particular importance for this thesis above that of most signs.

With the analysis of racist humour in mind, it is essential to recognise that race, despite its diminished scientific or social scientific status, *still* exists as a normal explanatory 'concept' in commonsense[23] or everyday language and communication, and is often used 'unproblematically' outside of academia. Most people using race have a limited awareness of the etymology of it or of the academic debates surrounding this etymology. In these instances, race forms a relatively cogent and understood means of distinguishing between populations and groups. Not all of these utterances will be racist, but for those that are, for the utterances of embodied racism (and also cultural racialization), race, as an order-building and hierarchical discursive system, will develop problems and anxieties associated with the production of ambivalence. These problems (the anxiety, ambivalence and incongruity of racism) develop because its subject matter - the 'other' - does not respond well to dichotomy formation and continues to elide assessment, principally through various challenges to racist discourse. This will find its way into humour.

Because of the existence of this 'unproblematic' use of race and because I am writing about racism in the main, rather than the identities of ethnic groups and the nomenclature they ought or wish to employ, I accept that race is a concept with an unsustainable ontological foundation, but cannot accept an anti-essentialist position because this would prevent me from recording and analysing embodied racist humour. Although the two are often interlinked, there *are* subtle differences between the study of racism and the anti-essentialist study, or conceptual formulation, of ethnic identity. Racism will have a semantic content that requires an analytic focus that often, quite obviously, differs from that of minority claims for recognition and attempts at identity formation. For the analyst, this means an interaction with quite different terms. Jenkins' (1994) distinction between consensual and imposed identities is useful here. He

[23] Commonsense discourse is defined as a concept that represents a certain fragmented use of language by people in myriad situations. This is quite similar to Antonio Gramsci's conception of common sense. In the 'Prison Notebooks' he states that 'common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space.... Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, ... is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is' (Gramsci, 1971: 419). The definition can be reworked to suggest that commonsense is certainly fragmentary, incoherent and ambiguous because it is made up of a number of discourses, but not inconsequential in effect, as it has ideological impact, although this often remains difficult to map in comparison to more 'coherent' or formal discourses. This fragmentation is described throughout as the existence of contradictory beliefs in the habitus.

distinguishes between social categorisation and internal identity formation, and suggests that 'there are few examples in the anthropological ethnicity literature of an explicit concern with *social categorization'* (1994: 207. Original emphasis). Here 'categorisation' signifies a definition imposed *on* a social group, which can be taken to include race typology. When discussing a usage of race, it is important to specify exactly who is using the concept and its intended semantics. In agreement with Jenkins, it does seem that most contemporary commentators tend to concentrate on the use of race for internal identity formation, or of perceptions of racism via internal identity formation.

For example, while Gilroy urges for the 'renunciation of 'race'' (1998: 838), as 'the only ethical response to the conspicuous wrongs that raciologies continue to solicit and sanction' (ibid: 838-9), his comments make little sense to the analyst of racist humour.[24] Specifically for my concerns, while his comments might have some merit for the evaluation of the conceptual schema used in identity formation, if adopted literally, they would leave the analyst of racism without the ability to even begin to describe much racist humour and might manufacture an analytic lens through which only culturally racist humour is viewed. If one stage in combating racism is to record and analyse it, it is imperative that this is not limited by the normative linguistic fashions of the social scientific community.

In relation to this, it is difficult to create a definitive normative or prescriptive grounding for terms such as 'race' in the abstract because they are always attached to a multiplicity of social practices, happenings and utterances that do not appear in correspondence to, or engage with, (or in some instances have any knowledge of) this normative framework. So while Spoonley, following the sociological zeitgeist, argues 'I want to reject this concept as oppressive and scientifically invalid' (Spoonley, 1995: 2), of course racism (and its usage of race) *always* is oppressive and scientifically invalid, but the recording of it, and subsequent analysis, is important.

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[24] This normative argument appears in many sociological accounts and seems to consistently ignore *'the conspicuous wrongs that'* ethnologies *'continue to solicit and sanction'*, and so does not subject ethnicity to the same level of scrutiny, or even test it through the same ontological lens. It seems odd that while many sociologists continue to place race in inverted commas as a dead concept, ethnicity is, despite the existence of ethnic hatred, ethnic conflict and ethnic cleansing, generally seen to be a 'positive' concept, one that allows 'an emphasis on the real potential of people and peoples to define themselves both in terms of what is particular to them and in terms of what they share with others' (Fenton, 1999: 237). This, to me, seems to be a slightly naïve normative assessment of the power relations involved in ethnicization at all socio-structural levels.

Some have also suggested that a use of racism might replace race in sociological analysis. Spoonley outlines this: 'The preferred alternative [to race] for analytical purposes is the concept of racism' (Spoonley, 1995: 3). I would maintain that it is not possible to not use race and still coherently talk about embodied racism, which actively draws on some notion, no matter how convoluted, of race. To disregard race in this way also ignores uses of race that are not racist - thus simultaneously setting a normative standard that either ignores, curtails or casts judgement over its potential for connotation.

Finally, to clarify my position, when I talk of race I am talking about a socio-linguistic construction with its own etymology, not racist in all instances as Fields (1982) and Appiah (1986) suggest but, paradoxically, a key order-building and dichotomy-forming sign in the vocabulary of racism. In terms of situating this usage inside Kim's typology of academics and activists, it has more in common with the quasi-essentialist position, as this analysis of racist humour is a critical investigation of, in the main, white racist joking.

Next I situate the thesis in relation to the concept of 'racialization'. This is done so the concept can be employed where necessary and its meanings defined in advance. The term 'racialization' was first recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1899 but specifically developed its contemporary social scientific meaning in the writings of Fanon and Miles (Barot and Bird, 2001: 602-3). The sociological usage of it, like that of race, is up for debate, with volumes being devoted to the discussion of its meaning and usefulness (e.g. ibid; Murji and Solomos, 2005).

First some positions that diverge from my own. For example, Banton's interpretation of how racialization should be used mirrors Spoonley's comments on racism. Barot and Bird explain how 'he uses this designation only after rejecting the usefulness of a number of other concepts including 'race' and 'raciation' (Barot and Bird, 2001: 606). For me, Banton's usage encounters the same logical dilemma that is faced by those, such as Spoonley, who replace race with racism, of removing or ignoring the *conceptual object* that is created by the *process* you are describing. Banton contextualises his position as one that would allow for increased conceptual clarity. He suggests that 'racialisation has been taken up by sociologists as a way out of the difficulties caused by the multiplicity of meanings given to the word race' (Banton, 1997: 35). This, to me, also seems to be a simplistic basis on which to ground the use of a particular term. First, while race may have a multiplicity of meanings, this is surely

important. These meanings are *social* occurrences and this should be studied rather than avoided or conceptually written out of the sociological map. Second, there is no way of knowing whether racialization, like race, will develop a multiplicity of meanings. Racialization might begin by signifying a social process, but become that of a biological process, become normatively positive or negative, become fixed or unstable, or as has evidently happened, develop a number of sociological interpretations similar to the typologies of race already mentioned.

In an attempt to summarise the discussion, Barot and Bird describe the sociological development of racialization as a 'replacement for 'race': Miles, Goldberg and others come to see 'race' as having real social consequences while being mythical; for them racialization is reintroduced into sociology as a more *useful* term' (2001: 606. Original emphasis). To reiterate my scepticism, it would seem that there is a certain amount of hyperbole involved in suggesting that the addition of a suffix to an existing concept creates a new concept, but despite this, racialization does specifically illuminate the existence of processes that create 'race', and so moves the meaning of the term away from one that is biologically or genetically fixed or innate, towards one that is dynamic. An important characteristic of racism (and of language generally, although of course racism is not always linguistic) is that it is dynamic. Its sign-systems are flexible and porous, and always able to include new signs, practices, events and peoples, or to reinvent the old. All of which find a further place in racist humour. Racist humour could certainly be labelled, with its rhetorical effects that seek to support racism, a form of embodied and/or cultural racialization, race creation or race formation, as a process that actively develops racist meaning as 'truth'. With this in mind, where I use the term it is to signify the processes of rhetorical reinforcement involved in racist humour that create racism or race.

Embodied Racism and the Dichotomy of Civilisation and Nature

Civilisation/nature is, I propose, the central dichotomy of embodied racism from which all others are derived, and connects very closely with notions of superiority and inferiority, which forms a key transferable, but not necessarily constitutive, component of other racisms.

Before I elaborate on this, I describe the sociological status of embodied racism. As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, embodied racism is often sidelined or

ignored in sociological analysis. In a specific example, Werbner, in the development of her concept of the 'grand inquisitor', which is a productive description of the ideal type Muslim of the Islamophobe, describes biological racism as a 'far cruder' form (Werbner, 2005: 7), and so as something the culturally racist view of grand inquisitor might attach itself to as *an addition*. The reliance on the older concept of biological racism, and its obvious anachronistic connotations, prevents such inquiry from seeing the widespread use of its remnants - embodied racism - which are much more free-floating. Likewise, it does not acknowledge that many past expressions of what has been labelled 'biological racism' would not have exhibited systemic totality and would have had more in common with embodied racism. While embodied racism does not need to be a constitutive part of cultural racism, there is little evidence that it is any more or less 'crude'. Werbner's account suggests Islamophobia exists in isolation to and without the need for embodied racism, yet it is evident that it has not been looked for. Overall, sociological approaches suggest it is a racism already analysed, already understood and already dealt with by the sociologist concerned with typologizing cultural racism, seeing it as dated and now irrelevant. Wieviorka presents a further example:

> racism *was* a way of thinking and acting that referred to the idea of human races, and the differentiation and ranking of groups and individuals in terms of their *natural phenotypical* or genetic attributes. Racism was in the *terminal* phase of its classical, biological era. (Wieviorka, 1997: 141. Emphasis added)

Although Wieviorka does not specify the social field to which he is referring, it is likely that he intends us to apply his comments to the development and status of race science, rather than to that of humorous discourse. This concentration on the formal sphere does not consider that embodied racism still exists in other discourses. Here is an example:

> Hang about, hang about, don't get excited, have we got any in? Can we have the lights up or something and have a look for them. You can't see them in those dark corners though, they hide in them. Oh dear me, come on smile, show yourself, where are you? Any about? I know there's some in, I seen the canoes in the car park. *Oh there's one over there* [Italics signify a stereotypical West Indian accent]. Can we get a spotlight on him, let's have a look. *Oh there's two of them there. How you gettin on brothers? Okay give me some skin young rascal man...* Where about's you from mate? Hang on, I'll translate that for you [succession of drum beats follow]. Yeah you lot have a laugh, I'll get a blow dart in my arse now. That'll be great. (Davidson, 1980)

Elements of biological racism exist and are reproduced in racist humour as embodied racism. While these depictions do not present the systemic totality of biological racism, they do reflect many of its internal truth claims. Jim Davidson's comedic career has

produced numerous examples of racist humour (see any of: Davidson, 1980, 1982, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d, 2001e, 2002, 2002b, 2003, 2005a, c2005b; The Bad Boys of Comedy, 2004). In this example, from a performance in 1980, 'natural' phenotypical characteristics *are* depicted - in the form of an emphasis on the skin colour of black people - and it is difficult to see how this racism exists in a terminal condition. Just one example of racist humour highlights the folly of believing that embodied racism died when it was supposed to. Importantly, what is also displayed in this example are the characteristics of savagery attributed to the black 'other', through the mention of canoes and blow darts, and the culturally racist themes of language and vernacular that appear in the same humorous utterance. So while embodied racism exists, this also renders the sociological distinction between embodied and cultural racism rather artificial.

Of major importance for the impact of embodied racism - and directly lifted from biological racism - is its ability to act as a classificatory system, or its ability to construct a dichotomy between the 'civilised' body of the self and 'uncivilised' body of the 'other'. This dichotomy works because of its close connection to a chain of signification in which civilisation implicitly connects to the superior, the cultural, cultivation, an interest in cerebral pursuits, and intelligence, whereas nature connotes the inferior, the savage, instinctive responses, corporeality and stupidity.

Embodied racism resembles a modern, order-building discourse imbued with an inheritance from enlightenment and colonial race investigations. David Hume suggested that, 'I am apt to suspect that negroes and in general all other species of man to be naturally inferior than to the whites' (Hume, 1997 [1754]: 33), in what was a classic piece of biological racism. Embodied racism reproduces such notions of superiority/inferiority. Although there were internal differences and debates among Enlightenment thinkers and not all created straightforward or uncritical race hierarchies, or agreed on these hierarchies (Chukwudi Eze, 1997: 6), these ideas represent a clear site of early dichotomy formation, which had, following Bauman's thesis, the inherent propensity to create ambivalence. This uncertainty is reproduced in embodied racism to a far greater extent because of the failed status of its biological ancestor.

Embodied dichotomies also have a colonial legacy, and so colonial racisms, or racisms that were developed, in part, through the colonial process and which symbolise the aims of that process, still exist in embodied racism. Banton has explained the link between the development of race and colonialism. Barot and Bird reiterate his position:

'Banton states clearly that the concept of 'race' developed as Europeans came into contact with people whose physical appearance was very different. As Banton says, "the contacts were important to the development by Europeans of racial categories" (Banton 1977: 13 in Barot and Bird, 2001: 607). Embodied racism, as a racism that uses race, has a colonial heritage. In contemporary sociology, Grosfoguel links colonialism to contemporary racisms by suggesting they can be conceptualised through understanding that, '[t]he negative symbolic images of colonial racialized subjects... are related to the colonial histories of each empire and the 'global coloniality' still present under a 'post-colonial', 'post imperial' capitalist world system' (2004: 331). As is documented later, these enlightenment/colonial racisms are directly transferred into embodied racist joking.

The jokes in this chapter appear from two sources. First, there are internet based racist jokes from US websites. Second, there are jokes from British stand-up comedy. Dealing with the first category, the US jokes depict black people in the main, although such websites also carry jokes about Hispanics, Jews and Arabs. I have chosen the example of black jokes because they provide an exemplary case study of the influence of the US specifically as an ex-slave society on the content of embodied racism. This is probably not representative of UK or European joking, or of US ethnic humour overall, but its selection provides a clear example of embodied racist joking as a particular discursive frame.

Specifically, in US society where, as Rattansi explains, the '"one drop" rule was adopted in many southern states, which implied that any black ancestry, however far back, consigned an individual to the wrong side of the white/black divide' (2007: 7), embodied characteristics of race difference play a far greater role in the construction of 'otherness' than they do in the European context. In comparison to Europe, this is explained by the lack of an initial culture that the 'other' moved into, of the cultural difference of all Americans at one level or another. It therefore firmly places this humour in a US context. What is significant is that the racial segregation of the US, which follows a binary distinction that places far more importance on the notions of black/white, is *not* a process devoid of the cognitive dilemmas outlined in Chapter Two. As Rattansi explains 'the seemingly obvious categories of 'white' and 'black' began to throw up their own anomalies' (ibid: 39). For example, in generic discussions of 'what is white?', in relation to Europe, and in relation to new settlers in 19th century America. Such ambiguity is exhibited around terms such as 'mulatto', 'creole', 'mango', 'sambo' and 'meamelou' (ibid: 43), suggesting that whiteness in the US, 'has never been a

simple matter of unambiguous visible difference' (ibid: 92). Therefore, in terms of racism, '[t]here is much inconsistency and contradiction in white American views of African Americans... *Ambivalence,* in other words, is as much a characteristic as simple racism in the views of those who might be simply dismissed as racist' (ibid: 124. Original emphasis).

Non-stereotyped Black and 'Nigger' Jokes

As highlighted earlier, some racist jokes, while containing racist signs, do not contain a direct or explicit expression of dichotomy and so do not directly affect ambivalence resolution. Such jokes do still have the potential for rhetorical effect and can be argued to affect racist certainty. I describe these racist jokes as 'non-stereotyped' and as having some similarity to the pseudo-ethnic jokes outlined by Raskin (1985: 205). The two styles of non-stereotyped jokes presented in this section are labelled black and 'nigger' jokes. Neither of the styles are discrete or always non-stereotyped and so the signs 'black' and 'nigger' can also appear in jokes that express racist ambivalence.

'Pseudo-ethnic' or Non-stereotyped Jokes

The popularity of Raskin's semantic script theory in humour studies, as a theoretically informed method for the empirical analysis of jokes, is mentioned and critiqued in Chapter One. Raskin defines a joke script in the following way:

> The script is a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalised by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. (1985: 81)

In other words, a script is a stream of discourse, or system of connotations, evoked by a sign or by a collection of signs. This stream of discourse might be ideological, a stereotype, a part of formal discourse, or an aspect of commonsense communication. Two of these scripts are described as the material needed to form an incongruity. Raskin documents many ethnic scripts that form ethnic jokes, most of which are disparaging (ibid: 180). All of these scripts are identical to race and ethnic dichotomous stereotypes. From this, Raskin defines an ethnic joke as that which contains one or two ethnic scripts. Following the logic presented by Raskin, a race joke (and implicitly also

a racist joke), is, *incorrectly*, one that contains a relevant combination of racial scripts to form its incongruity. Raskin labels any jokes that make reference to ethnic groups but which do not contain ethnic scripts as 'pseudo-ethnic jokes' (ibid: 205). On this he argues:

> In many cases, what is presented as ethnic humour, in fact, belongs solely to these other categories of humor [such as sexual or political] and is not all ethnic [sic]. Thus, (281) can be presented as a Hispanic joke:
>
> (281) "Angelo, did you take the school bus this morning?" "No, teacher, I can't drive. And my big brother didn't do it either - he is sick today."
>
> It is obvious there is nothing Hispanic or ethnic about the joke besides the name... The name could be Ivan, Jacques, Chaim, or Ching, and the school bus could be a trolley bus, tram, shuttle, or rickshaw, respectively or (almost) irrespective, and the joke would still be the same. (ibid)

Raskin argues, by using his definition of an ethnic script, that in this example no ethnic script is presented. He adds, '[t]he script of dumbness, often associated with the Hispanics in the United States, is clearly inapplicable here because the script of the incompetent student has nothing to do with it and is very universal' (ibid: 205).

Raskin's concept of the pseudo-ethnic joke is problematic and in need of replacement. Despite the obvious connection between the themes of dumbness and incompetence, which renders Raskin's example of the Hispanic joke inappropriate, his argument has troublesome implications for the analysis of racist humour, and fails to identify a large section of it. Take, for example, the joke below:

> Q. Two black guys decide to jump off a building, who lands first?
> A. Who cares?
> (Blackjokes.net, no date)

This joke, from a US website, following Raskin's definition of the pseudo-ethnic joke, would not qualify as ethnic humour and would be categorised as a pseudo-ethnic joke because it *does not* include ethnic scripts. The only specifically ethnic characteristic in this joke is the noun 'black', and many others could replace this. So for example, 'lawyers' could replace 'black guys', and the joke, under Raskin's logic, would remain the same. This of course, is incorrect. The use of the word 'black' changes the meaning of the joke completely and firmly establishes it as a race joke, and a racist joke. On this issue, Billig highlights that, '[t]he disturbing fact is that one word changes a joke.. to the most bigoted humour. To use Freud's terminology, the 'joke-work' is identical' (Billig, 2005b: 26). Small changes in 'joke-work' evoke different meanings, and

importantly, what is not emphasised by Raskin is that the meaning of a joke is not solely constructed by the script elements of an incongruity, but by the meaning of all of the signs in the joke and the connotations they provoke. This invokes the distinction between points one and two of my methodology - between discursive content and connotation - as both need to be considered for clear analysis. This may seem an obvious point, but it is important to avoid the rigid definition of ethnic humour that prevails in the field of semantic script theory. I will say more about the meanings evoked by the signs 'black' and 'nigger'. In moving away from Raskin's pseudo-ethnic label, these jokes are more adequately described as 'non-stereotyped'.

Black and 'Nigger' Jokes

To explain the category of black jokes, the comments of Hall (1995) on the influence of Volosinov, Gramsci and Laclau's ideas on ideological linguistic struggle are useful. He outlines how they discovered that, '[w]hat mattered was the way in which different social interests or forces might conduct an ideological struggle to disarticulate a signifier from one, preferred or dominant meaning-system, and rearticulate it in another, different chain of connotations' (Hall, 1995: 360). These struggles exist around racist and non-racist descriptions of skin colour as an indicator of race membership. The term 'black' is an example of a noun that describes a racial group and encourages contested connotations that move between racist and non-racist descriptions. Hall explains that an interaction with Volosinov and Gramsci's philosophy of language has allowed for, '[t]he switch from "black = despised" to "black = beautiful" [which] is accomplished by inversion' (ibid). It is axiomatic that this has been highly significant in the formation of black political identity (e.g. Gilroy, 1987, 1993; St. Louis, 2002). Before this though, signifiers of colour had a long history of use as racist expression. Enlightenment thinkers seem to have found the colour differences of colonial subjects to be fascinating, with reasons being stipulated for their causes and descriptions made of their characteristics. In these discourses it is 'whiteness' that remains fixed and constant, and 'blackness' that is seen as abnormal.[25]

[25] For example, the Comte de Buffon highlights this perfectly: 'if a colony of negroes were transplanted into a northern province, their descendants of the eighth, tenth, or twelfth generation would be much fairer, and perhaps as white as the natives of that climate' (Comte de Buffon, 1997: 24). This extract is interesting precisely because it displays the skin colour of the 'other', and the difference this highlights, as something that is not fixed and that might be worked upon by civilising processes.

The acknowledgement that language always has a polysemic element is essential for understanding Hall's comments on the wrestled meaning of 'black', which always leaves the semantic potential for a reversal of the process of meaning creation. The use of 'black' in racist humour acts as a macro sign that refers to a racial group. In doing this it connotes meaning in non-stereotyped jokes and forms specific connections between stereotypes in other jokes. Therefore, the use of a term such as 'black', which is central for informing a positive, anti-racist, political identity, still has a central role as a signifier in a second-order racist metalanguage (Barthes, 1993: 114-5), connecting stereotypes that include judgements of moral worth, intelligence, civilisation, modernity and sexuality (ibid: 113-7; Hall, 1995: 359-60). Below is an example:

> Q; Why are black peoples nostrils so big?
> A: Because that's what God held them by when he was painting them.
> (BlackJokes.net, no date)

This joke sees the colour and physicality of black people as something to be examined by the racist. The rhetorical shift is created by a basic incongruity in the image formed, of God holding a black person by the nostrils. Here the discursive content - or stereotypes - are minimal, in that only nostril size is mentioned. The connotations created by 'black' form a link though, and it is the incongruous image - and the alienation formed - that creates the racist meaning.

What is significant in many non-stereotyped black jokes is their direct expression of the second logic of racist humour - proteophobic exclusion - particularly in the form of waste expulsion. Bauman (2004a) describes how the production of human waste was a significant feature of both the development of modernity and the colonial process. He argues '[t]he production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans... is an inevitable outcome of modernisation... It is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building*' (2004a: 5. Original emphasis). Below is a joke that depicts human waste:

> why does a black man's funeral only have 2 paulbearers?
> cause a trashcan only has two handles
> [sic] (d2jsp, 2003)

We *can* identify this as a non-stereotyped racist joke because no dichotomous stereotypes are offered expression or resolution in it. Importantly though, this explicit expression of proteophobia does connote meanings of waste storage and disposal. In discourse, images of dirt, of something being dirty or an article of waste, are often used to signify an object that is seen to be socially out of place (Lockyer and Pickering,

2001). Proteophobia is a reaction to objects that are out of place in impressions of social space. Here the impression appears specifically aesthetic. The joke expresses the urge to see the 'other' as a waste product, metaphorically allowing for the viewing of the 'other' as in preparation for removal from social space, of being that object out of place. The joke sets up an imaginary, rhetorical and proteophobic arena in which the urge can be lived out - in which reality is redefined - this is the *palliative of relief* provided by humour. Yet the joke could quite easily be used to describe any group by replacing the word 'black', and so fails to be included in Raskin's problematic category of the ethnic joke. Below is a second example:

> Q: What do you call a black man at the bottom of the ocean?
> A: Pollution
> (BlackJokes.net, no date)

While these jokes do not directly express dichotomy, following Bauman's argument, they are directly related to the implicit management of the overall cognitive failure that the 'other' provokes and of which proteophobia is a reaction. Here the semantic alienation of the joke replaces the black man with the image of pollution.

One, if not the, most extreme and offensive racist signs is 'nigger'. This sign is examined in jokes on US websites, as a specific form of embodied racist humour. I have explained that non-stereotyped jokes are a generic type in which terminology outside of the elements of the incongruity can be replaced to create very different jokes. 'Nigger' jokes are a second subcategory, and like 'black', 'nigger' can be used interchangeably in non-stereotyped jokes (which serves to further highlight the inapplicability of Raskin's definition), or appear in jokes that contain ambivalent stereotypes.[26] What follows is an example of a non-stereotyped 'nigger' joke:

> Q: What Do You call Mike Tyson if he has no arms or legs?
> A: Nigger, Nigger, Nigger!!!!
> (Black One Liners, no date)

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[26] Billig (2001), in an article on the jokes found on three Ku Klux Klan websites, analyses one joke that presents a 'definition of a nigger', which takes the format of a mock dictionary definition. In this example, the term 'nigger' is presented alongside a number of dichotomous racist stereotypes. The rhetorical incongruity is generated by 'mixing the language of prejudiced stereotypes (that is, the greasy fried chicken) with the sombre language of the apparently unprejudiced dictionary' (ibid: 277). It is possible to suggest that in specific racist readings, the joke could provide a rhetorical effect in the form of redefining the perception of the stereotypes presented. In this example, the appropriation of the serious dictionary format, or the confusion of serious and humorous contexts, allows the audience the momentary chance to redefine the discourse in the serious realm, of viewing it as being serious and truthful in humour that, paradoxically, have no truth criteria.

In this joke the extreme and offensive meaning of the word becomes an important part of the joke. The joke allows for the use of this most extreme racist expression towards the 'dangerous' Mike Tyson, and imagines Tyson in a state of vulnerability. The positioning of the extremely prejudicial term 'nigger', the threat of Tyson and vulnerability of Tyson minus his arms and legs, creates - through the rhetorical device of exaggeration - an incongruity and an imagined humorous situation for the 'safe' articulation of 'nigger' and its associated meanings. Once again the joke contains no obvious stereotypes inside its incongruity but it certainly is racist.

In describing the associated meanings of 'nigger' and the extreme nature of the word, I excerpt some terminology from Žižek (1995) and from Lacan before him, and describe 'nigger' as a 'master signifier' for embodied racism. In doing this, I use the term without employing either Lacan's or Žižek's theories of the unconscious, and aim only to utilise their ideas on language. 'Nigger' acts as a master signifier because of its established stability as a pejorative epithet in embodied racism. This is highlighted further through some of Barthes' observations. Barthes (1993) outlines how myth or ideology is naturalised through connotation, or through the ability of second order signifiers to appear over literal meanings, and this was observed around the signifier 'black'. While myth is created through connotation, it is evident that some signs, particularly at the level of second-order signification, exhibit a relative stability or fixity and have a particular ideological effect because of this. Barthes says of these cases, 'the denoted image naturalises the symbolic message' (1977b: 44).

This denotative power can limit the potential of a sign to connote. So while Barthes explains that, 'there always remains, around a final meaning, a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating: the meaning can almost always be *interpreted*' (1993: 132. Original emphasis), and so expresses a revolutionary potential and hope in language as a means of overcoming ideology; there *is* an important 'almost always' in this quote. Concentrating on this 'almost always', in some instances the denotation of a sign can be so powerful that Barthes' 'halo' does not easily appear. This is unlikely around a first-order meaning, rather, a meaning may denote strongly after it has developed through a number of connotations that have since been erased, or have, perhaps more specifically, been swamped.

As a master signifier, 'nigger' has this denotative meaning in racism. Hall states that '[d]enotative meanings, of course are not uncoded; they, too, entail systems of classification and recognition in much the same way as connotative meanings do; they

are not natural but 'motivated' signs' (1995: 359). In addition to this, signs with very strong denotative meanings that have emerged through connotation usually have a certain type of history. The association of 'nigger' as a means of describing US slave populations denotes a history of oppression and violence. This denotive capacity is relatively fixed in the same way that the meaning of the swastika now denies connotation because of its connection with the racist and inhuman treatment of peoples. Barthes outlines this process, arguing that if pure denotation exists,

> it is perhaps not at the level of what ordinary language calls the insignificant, the neutral, the objective, but on the contrary, at the level of absolutely traumatic images. The trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning... One could imagine a kind of law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult is connotation. (Barthes, 1977a: 30-31)

The etymology of the term 'nigger' conforms to this.[27] 'Nigger' is a sign that has become central to US expressions of embodied racism, with a strong denotative foundation as a master signifier. The meaning of 'nigger' does not lend itself well to connotation; there is little potential for the term to come to mean something other than an extreme racist insult.[28] As a master signifier, its denotative meaning prevents it having a connotative ability, yet the denotative meaning is highly ideological because its past connotations have constructed it specifically in this direction. While it cannot move between discourses through connotation (because of its offensiveness), it does provide a reliable and extreme form of insult for racist discourse.

Jokes that use the term are not only found on internet sites. Occasionally they appear in British stand-up comedy. Jim Davidson uses it to articulate racism in the third person. Davidson, while performing an impression of a US marine he is said to have met, has the marine say the word in the song of a drill march. Davidson describes

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[27] The Latin word 'niger' means black, and 'negro' means black in Spanish and Portuguese, both of which are Romanic or New Latin languages. From this, the Spanish and Portuguese used the term to signify either black Africans or those of African descent. Later, between the eighteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century, negro became a noun for denoting African-Americans. This highlights the movement and adaption of 'niger' from Latin into modern languages as a race signifier and represents one level of connotation. The slave trade again had an impact on the semantics of the term. In the US, Texan vernacular saw 'negro' pronounced as 'nigra' and this became a disparaging term for describing African-Americans. The pronouciation presents a short step to the development of the pejorative epithet 'nigger'. As an extreme racist insult the connotations that the sign has undergone are not obviously clear and the connotative potential has now slowed down as its denotive meaning has become established.

[28] The term 'nigga', when used by black people as a term of endearment, can be argued to contradict this. A full discussion of the appropriation is presented in Chapter Five and it is argued this new meaning is inherently connected to the old, and re-presents the semantic potential of the original meaning.

himself as the one who questions the marine by saying, 'you can't say that', to which Davidson's marine exclaims 'I'm in the US army, I can say whatever I want' (Davidson, 2005). While the truth or falsity of this story is both unverifiable and unimportant, and Davidson is being mildly xenophobic towards Americans in the first person, by articulating a 'nigger' joke in the third person he provides himself with a defence against accusations of racism while still being able to gain a laugh through its use. This mirrors a technique identified in studies of everyday racism, where participants use the third person to express racism (Wetherall and Potter, 1992), and coupled with it being a comic expression, it provides two layers of protection for Davidson's joke.[29]

Non-stereotyped 'nigger' jokes will, like black jokes, usually express the second logic of racist humour, which is Bauman's proteophobia. 'Nigger' jokes that express proteophobia do so in a more extreme fashion, in addition to the use of 'nigger', and often form death jokes:

> Q. What's the difference between a truck full of baby niggers and a truck full of bowling balls?
> A. You can't unload a truck full of bowling balls with a pitchfork.
> (racist-jokes.com, 2003)

Death and exclusion jokes express a genocidal desire to destroy the 'other', of removing the racial 'other' through death. This particular joke depicts the horrific image of 'baby niggers' being unloaded using a pitch-fork. It depicts the children of the 'other' as objects to be disposed of, as subhuman 'others' incomparable to 'normal' members of society or occupiers of social space, and so adheres to Fanon's comment that in racism it is often the 'corporeality of the Negro that is attacked' (1970: 115-16). It is noticeable that the racist terminology used in this joke, of 'baby niggers', is a style that would be used to describe young animals, and so the joke depicts black children as alien or not-human, using a distinctly zoomorphic and metaphoric rhetorical device. This joke clearly resonates with much of the discourse of the extreme right, which sees cruelty, violence and ultimately the extermination of the 'other' as quite acceptable. The joke is a rhetorical expression of this.

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[29] Another example in the show saw Davidson discuss famine in Niger via a critique of 'lefty goody-goodies'. In this example the term is referred to implicitly by suggesting that, when he heard about the famine, he thought the journalist had mispronounced 'Niger' (Davidson, 2005).

The Key Dichotomies of Embodied Racism

The presence of non-stereotyped racist jokes has been outlined. These jokes usually present the second of Wieviorka's logics of racism - exclusion - and so express proteophobia. I now chart three interlinked civilization/nature dichotomies in embodied racism that receive expression, and so in particular readings, resolution, in racist humour. First, a racist enlightenment mind/body dichotomy sees the 'other' as having both less intelligence and increased corporeality. Second, a linked dichotomy focuses on the sexuality of the 'other' and describes it as corporeal, savage and unrestrained. Third, jokes are identified that depict the 'other' and her increased corporeality as taking part in specific social practices. The jokes often transgress the boundaries of embodied and cultural racism, hence emphasising the analytical nature of the distinction between the two forms, and this is identified where relevant.

The jokes mentioned in the three examples express elements of the first logic of racist humour, which is that of inclusion at the cost of the inferiorization of the 'other'. It is argued that even if dichotomous stereotypes are presented as 'positive' they are attached to a chain of signification that promotes inferiorization through humorous semantic alienation or promote negative stereotypes in the second logic of the joke.

Civilisation and Intelligence

The first dichotomy is the enlightenment construction of the civilisation and intelligence of the white European in opposition to the nature and stupidity of the colonial subject, and reflects a supposed race hierarchy of intelligence and competence of language use and a parallel inverted hierarchy of corporeality. The section examines the stereotype in jokes that explicitly or implicitly connects intelligence to genetics, biology or race, and that juxtapose intelligence with references to physicality, all of which give the depictions a distinct embodied dimension.

In its most common form, the dichotomous stereotype suggests that black people have lower intelligence levels than other races. The etymology of the dichotomy has been traced to a distortion of both seventeenth century Cartesian mind/body dualism and nineteenth century Darwinian 'law of compensation' (St. Louis, 2005). With reference to Darwin, the stereotype represents a simplification of his theory that

describes how an organism, 'through natural selection *reduces* redundant parts' (St. Louis, 2005b: 119. Original emphasis), and develops other areas in compensation. Other examples of enlightenment philosophical comment on the intelligence of the black race appear in Kant's writing from the eighteenth century, who once wrote, '[t]his fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid' (1993b [1764]: 57). In another example, Kant uses metaphor to convince the reader of the lower cognitive capacity of the black race: 'So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in relation to mental capacities as in color' (1997b: 55).

The eighteenth century philosopher David Hume joined in on the act, arguing on the intelligence of black men that, '[i]n Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly' (1997 [1754]: 33). Hegel, in the nineteenth century, wrote that, '[t]he characteristic feature of the Negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity - for example, of God or the law - in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being' (1997: 127).

Race hierarchy did not only classify the black race. Kant is useful here: 'Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites. The yellow Indians do have a meagre talent. The Negroes are far below them and at the lowest point are a part of the American peoples' (Kant, 1997c: 63).

This provides proof of the anthropological grounding of race/intelligence theories. To bring us more up-to-date, St. Louis outlines recent additions:

> R. Meade Bache, ...writing at the end of the nineteenth century, recognised an 'inverse relationship' between physical and intellectual capacities observable with the disparate boxing ability of different racial groups... Similarly Scott Fleming (2001) outlines the emergence of a racial hierarchy in relation to athletic ability that categorises 'black physiques' as *the* appropriate type for physical activity. And, crucially, these understandings of physical suitability are dependant on the logical opposition between the 'apparent physical superiority' of the black race with its 'intellectual inferiority'. (ibid)

Adding to the evidence, there are ample contemporary depictions of race having a bearing on levels of intelligence. In the British context, the stereotype has been recorded in empirical research. Jenkins found that the perception of West Indians as 'lazy, happy-go-lucky or slow' appeared in 43 per cent of interviews in his study of

middle managers (Jenkins, 1986, cited in Modood, 1997: 162). Modood also cites a Runnymede Trust survey that found that 'about 15 per cent of whites and nearly the same number of Asians agreed with the proposition "White people are more intelligent than black people"' (Amin and Richardson, 1992: 44, cited in ibid). This shows, if only in a cursory manner, that the dichotomy has a contemporary resonance. It also has an existence that, as a dichotomous stereotype, is prone to the affliction of instability, cognitive failure and ambivalence that Bauman outlines around order-building discourse.

Rhetorical strengthening can subdue these afflictions. Hence the stereotypes of intelligence and race also find a home in racist humour:

> Q. What's long and hard on a black man?
> A. The first grade.
> (Blind Lemon's Nigger Jokes, 2005)

In this joke, 'black' performs the necessary connective role of its signification, the penis stereotype acts as the major premise (Palmer, 1987) (this stereotype is discussed in the next section), the intelligence stereotype acts as a connotative meaning or the minor premise (ibid), and the joke uses the two stereotypes to develop an incongruity. The use of 'long and hard' creates a slippage of meaning between the two stereotypes, by taking the literal meaning, of penis size, and adding a connotative meaning, of black intelligence. This point of meaning creation - the slippage between the two stereotypes - is the point at which the joke creates its rhetorical effect and potentially resolves the instability of the minor premise, as meaning is connoted through humour and the convincing, yet convoluted, non-meaning of rhetorical expression momentarily appears.[30] The joke therefore offers resolution of the minor premise. Such jokes have been empirically documented. In humour studies, Raskin has shown the combination of sexual and intelligence stereotypes in jokes, and states, 'the oversexed script is often associated with the minority labelled stupid as well' (Raskin, 1995: 195) (see also for further racist examples: Billig, 2001). Below is an example that does not draw on any other stereotypes:

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[30] There are also versions of the above joke available on the internet that replace 'black man' with 'nigger' (see for example, White Arian Resistance, 2005), and various examples that also replace the 'first grade' punch line with 'third grade' or other signifiers of basic levels of schooling or intellectual achievement. The inclusion of 'nigger' obviously makes the joke more offensive as it includes the denotative significance of this master signifier.

Q: Ever hear about the black man who went to college?
A: Neither Have I.
(BlackJokes.net, no date)

This joke simply presents the stereotype on its own in the joke-work, which gives it the appearance of 'true' humour.

Competence of language use forms another important element for the dichotomy of civilisation and the mind. Fanon (1970) argued that stereotypical views of the linguistic ability of the 'negro' sought to oppress, both in terms of definitions of ability and of how the 'other' was to be spoken to: 'To make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible' (1970: 26. Original emphasis). In this case, the mannerisms of the educated are incommensurable with the dispositions of the 'negro'.

In providing an allegorical representation of the stereotype of intelligence, giving some 'actual' representation to intelligence, racialized linguistic competence finds its way into humour:

Q: Why did the black man wear a tuxedo to his vasectomy?
A: He said: "If I'ze gonna be im-po-tent, I wanna looks im-po-tant."
(Blackjokes.net, no date)

The joke uses an 'inversion of letters', or a play-on-letters to enact a diversion of literal rationality (see Speier, 1998: 1365, for some historical examples of 'inversions of letters' as a humour trope), and draws on the comic technique of 'ignorance' (Berger, 1995a: 54). This inversion mocks the black man's supposed ability to understand the functioning of language, suggesting that he cannot distinguish the correct meaning of words, even where these meanings are quite different. The joke connects linguistic ability with intelligence levels and racializes both through the use of the race sign 'black'. This racialization is more specific in the joke below, which simply equates 'black' directly with stupidity:

Q: Why can't black people spell.
A: Because there black.
[sic] (ibid)

This joke makes the same allegorical representations preformed in the previous joke. In this case the joke may be read in two ways. First, as a joke that can only be read, the spelling error in the joke expresses the dichotomy of civilisation/intelligence and

simultaneously provokes its ambivalence. This, while placing literal doubt on the stereotype, does so in a rhetorical device and comic frame without serious truth criteria. Thus the joke can, paradoxically, express and rhetorically support the stereotype through changing the truth criteria of criticism and simultaneously highlighting its ambiguity. Second, as a verbal and a written joke, the spelling mistake might be genuine and so might disrupt the rhetorical message. In this written version, as we can imagine, the joke might be *less* funny for the racist who can spell. The intended rhetorical meaning is diffused by the spelling error and the racist who spots the error may not laugh as much. Importantly though, there are clearly some racist jokers who cannot spell, and this forms an important disjuncture between the racist stereotype believed in, and their own reality, which perhaps such jokes then help to dispel. This joke appears more polysemic than other examples.

Finally, an example from Jim Davidson's comedy combines both elements of the dichotomy:

> There's these two Irishmen. Now isn't it nice to be able, to be able to say that now? These two Irishmen, or these two Welshmen, or these two Jocks, or an Englishman, Scotsman and Irishman, or these two Pakistanis, or these two Bangladeshis. Are we all going to join together and have some fun like it used to be or are we still going to have all this politically correct shit that goes on? Do you remember the stuff I used to do about Chalky? You remember Chalky? Yes. I used to love doing jokes about Chalky having a bigger dick. If that's fucking racist I want to be black. Do you remember the silly jokes I used to do? Right, like me and Chalky stood on the bridge having a wee in the River Thames and I said "that water down there's cold isn't it". *"Yeah it's deep too"* [italics in quotation marks signify a stereotypical Afro-Caribbean accent]. Remember that? Remember Chalky in the pink Vauxhall Cresta, 1976 *New Faces*, stuck at the traffic lights, *"get going car, I fucking broke down at de traffic lights"*. Big queue of people, "get out the fucking way". *"Fuck off"* and the light's red, amber, green. Remember Nick Nick? Oh my god, up came this biro refill copper, sarcastic fuck, looking at the traffic lights, looking at the queue. He said, "You alright mate? Haven't we got a colour you like then?" *"Broke down"*. "Broke down?" *"Can't get me ve-hicle started"*. "Lift the bonnet up, I'll have a go". The copper gets it going first time. He said, *"What was the matter with it?* "You've got shit in the carburettor". He said, *"how often have I got to do that then?"* Marvellous jokes, lovely Chalky. (Davidson, 2001e)

This extract from Davidson's act is interesting precisely because it makes reference to a number of the most prevalent dichotomies in embodied racism. Before that though, and to begin the joke, Davidson makes the case that politically correct attitudes towards his comedy are absurd. This can be read as an attempt to negotiate, or rhetorically argue for, the acceptability of the racist expression. In Chapter Two I argued that acceptability and unacceptability formed an attitudinal dichotomy that might be negotiated in embodied racist humour. The example also forms a connection between

culturally racist or nationalist comic discourses, and shows the close connection of this material to the embodied racism that is to follow in the joke. They are, for Davidson, a part of the same genre. After this he articulates the sexual stereotype of the black man's penis size, which will be discussed next as a part of a collection of dichotomous sexual stereotypes. Finally, Davidson comes to his infamous 'Chalky White' character, the Afro-Caribbean caricature in part responsible for Davidson's notoriety as a controversial comedian, and displays 'Chalky's' affected linguistic competence and intelligence.

Savagery and Sex

The second dichotomy concerns the savage sexuality of the 'other' in comparison to the civility of the European, but also relates to characteristics of indolence and degeneration. The dichotomy of the 'other' as sexually dangerous also has a clear colonial origin, as fear of the dangers of miscegenation had a central place in colonial discourse (Sampson, 2005: 23). The early colonial period (circa 1600-1700) saw mixed race peoples disadvantaged in various colonial practices, with similar race hierarchies deployed to categorise and, in the main, disadvantage and racialize individuals and groups of mixed race. Concurrently, an amount of racial mixing took place in some colonies that most frequently occurred 'between European men and non-European women…' (ibid: 22-23). Embodied racism often endeavours to degrade the sexuality of the 'other', and especially the sexuality of the black 'other', and to describe them, in particular circumstances, as unsuitable sexual partners for whites. These ideas developed in the later period of colonialism. In the American context, Sampson highlights that, '[b]y the nineteenth century … attitudes had changed … marriage for higher-ranking American men meant 'suitable' marriage' (ibid: 63), and did not involve the mixing of races as it previously had. This trend constituted a movement away from the strategic, economically motivated, intermarriage of the earlier colonial period and accompanied an increased movement of single women into the colonies, and the emergence of a new preoccupation - the sexual chastity of the single white women (ibid: 66). This preoccupation received formalisation in legal discourse, for example, '[i]n Australian-governed Papua New Guinea, the *White Women's Protection Ordinance* of 1926 imposed the death penalty for any indigenous man convicted of the rape or attempted rape of a white woman' (ibid). Similarly, in the US context, an 1883 Supreme Court ruling saw 'close personal contact', including marriage, to be outlawed between blacks and whites (Rattansi, 2007: 44). These colonial prejudices, of the

dangerous or problematic sexuality of the 'other', appear extensively in embodied racist humour and develop around a number of particular stereotypes. Below is a sociological outline of the ideas:

> The men of Group B are equipped with huge genitals and are unrestrained in their lust to deflower the women of Group A. The thing to note here is not the untruth of the stereotypes, or the truth of the stereotypes... but that these and other such notions are largely invented and passed on to the women of Group A by the men of Group A. Many white women may come to desire or 'fear' (often another word for desire) black men as a direct result of the white man's sexual propaganda about coloured people. The perception of Group B in purely sexual terms is something often *insisted* upon by the males of Group A. (Hernton, 1969: 12 - 13. Original emphasis)

Hernton describes one of the most prevalent and reoccurring stereotypes in embodied racist joking, namely jokes about stereotypical beliefs in the differences of male genitalia between races. These jokes focus on black, Afro-Caribbean or African-American men as the principle subject of the joke but will also use other races, often as a means of comparison. Jokes of this type appear on both internet sites and in contemporary British comedy, as Davidson exemplifies:

> No when I'm Prime Minister ladies and gentlemen, if any of my ministers are gay that's fine with me but the first thing I shall say is 'own up'. Don't be like certain fuckin blokes. There was this certain Welsh minister, from the Labour fuckin Party [Davidson spits on the floor]. Allegedly, he was on Clapham Common where he gave two Rastafarians a blow job. Which proves to me that he'd been gay for sometime. No, cos if you're just starting out you don't fuckin start on Rastafarians. No you work your way up to those via Filipinos or Bangladeshis. You can't start with stretch marks around your mouth. (Davison, 2003)

In this joke, Davidson's homophobia is combined with the ubiquitous stereotype. He also racializes Filipino and Bangladeshi men in his genital continuum, who, in this example, inhabit a lower position in his race hierarchy of penis size. This joke uses the simple incongruity of 'stretch marks' to emphasise and deliver its political message.[31]

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[31] There are a number of sociological accounts of sexual stereotypes and many employ a psychoanalytic dimension to expound the continued existence of the stereotype long after its initial colonial emergence. Returning to Hernton (1969), he wrote that 'coloured men and women become the objects onto which all kinds of sexual derangements of the culture, as well as those of individual whites, are projected' (12), and Fanon, at a similar time, explained the coupling of this particular racist stereotype and race violence when he argued:

> when a white man hates black men, is he not yielding to a feeling of impotence or of sexual inferiority? Since his ideal is an infinite virility, is there not a phenomena of diminution in relation to the Negro, who is viewed as a penis symbol? Is the lynching of the Negro not a sexual revenge? We know how much sexuality there is in all cruelties, tortures, beatings. One has only to reread a few pages of the Marquis de Sade to be easily convinced of the fact. (1970: 113)

Of course the reoccurrence of this stereotype as a content of humour does not relate to the 'truth' or 'falsity' of the stereotype, which by definition is, like that of any dichotomous stereotype, already in some instances true and in some instances false, or internally incoherent and so ambivalent as a type of knowledge formed through dichotomy. The reoccurrence of the stereotype does, however, function as a rhetorical anxiety reduction process. In this case the stereotypes of sexuality and physicality connect directly with an image of barbaric and impure corporeality, which are a key aspect of the European and US racialization of blacks. Here is a second example:

> I do wear my pants in, I know it's not sexy girls, your pants in bed, but I fuckin do in bed in case a burglar comes in. And the reason is you've got to use reasonable force and puff-up like a bullfrog, "right get out of my fuckin house, you worry about it", and no matter how tough you are your little dick's gonna be fuckin backing in, like. It's gonna be frightened, it's gonna be fuckin scared init? "Oh no a burrrglars coming in". Your dick's gonna be talking to your bollocks, "come up we're gonna get fuckin kicked". You know you can't stand there with the fuckin thing doing that. What if it's a black burglar? *'What da fuck is that little fuck?!'* [Italics signify stereotypical West Indian accent] (Davidson, 2003)

Davidson uses his own physicality in the context of the joke and shows the black man as a burglar or invader, as a problematic and threatening 'other' who can pass symbolic judgment on the masculinity of Davidson. This represents an expression of racist anxiety, an anxiety that is generated by the racist's own dichotomy. The potential theft the burglar is capable of, the fear of the invading 'other', affects Davidson's own sexual presentation through the necessity of wearing pants that are 'not sexy' in bed. As a dichotomous stereotype emerging in humour, functions can be served for the serious. First, the example shows the reoccurring technique of articulating a taboo subject, such as stereotypes of sexuality, in humour. The joke is able to articulate the stereotype in a form that will not be judged by the same standards of acceptability that serious discourses undergo. It will also not be judged by serious standards of truthfulness. Second, the existence of this dichotomous stereotype can be rhetorically strengthened through its presentation as a joke. In the case of this joke, it uses the rhetorical devices of hyperbole or exaggeration, and a device very similar to a pathetic fallacy or personification. Once again the minor premise that appears focuses on the penis stereotype. In terms of motive, one might draw on the notion of the tendentious projection of anxiety onto the 'other' as the motor behind the expression.

If psychoanalytic projection can be equated with a manifestation of attempts to define the 'other', and impose this fixity in discourse against inherent ambivalences and contradictions generated by the dichotomies and counter discourses, then it is possible to connect these ideas with my argument.

On US websites penis jokes form a part of a dichotomy in embodied racism that connects with a number of other stereotypes of savage sexuality. These connections include the idea that black men are misogynistic and have a propensity to commit rape, that black people are sexually promiscuous and irresponsible, and that black children should be conceptualised as being of little value or as subhuman. All of these themes directly connect with older discourses of colonial sexual racism. Two variations of rape jokes that also employ the term 'nigger' follow:

> How can you tell a nigger's just had sex?
> His eyes are all red from the mace'
> (White Aryan Resistance, 2005)

Another example reads:

> What's a niggers idea of foreplay?
> "Don't scream or I'll cut you, bitch."
> (Tight Rope, 2005)

Added to this stereotype are examples of negligent and promiscuous sexuality, for example,

> How do you get a nigger to wear a condom?
> Put a Nike logo on it!
> (White Aryan Resistance, 2005)

Finally, black children are depicted as being of little worth or potential, or simply as subhuman:

> How does a niggress take a pregnancy test?
> She sticks a banana up her pussy, if it comes out half-eaten you know there's another monkey on the way!
> (ibid)

These jokes view black sexuality as problematic. It is worth noting that both 'Tight Rope' and 'White Arian Resistance' are websites of the American hard Right that depict Nazi and Ku Klux Klan symbols and carry serious articles that contain extreme racism, forming a discursive connection with past US anti-miscegenation laws and segregation. While comedians such as Jim Davidson may never tell such extreme jokes or hold these views, the jokes that they do tell on the sexuality of the 'other' feed into and support the same collection of sexual dichotomies that inferiorize the 'other' in embodied racism.

Jokes about black childbirth move from the dichotomy of sexual racism towards the proteophobic register. These jokes tend to sit on the proteophobic typology as excrement jokes. This adds a disparaging connotation to the metaphor of refuse because

while waste is often described as a nuisance and something that needs to be removed from social space, excrement is viewed socially as a particularly disgusting form of waste, that should, under no circumstances, be tolerated in social space. These ideas develop in ubiquitous societal discourses of normality and civilisation. It is normal and civilised to dispose of your excrement efficiently - failure to do so is not just unhygienic or symptomatic of psychological disorder - it is also morally questionable. As Lockyer and Pickering explain '[f]ilth as a label necessarily refers to a boundary' (2001: 644). The metaphor dynamically accommodates a different type of proteophobia. By describing the 'other' using 'vituperative adjectives' (ibid: 643), as 'shit' or as 'crap', pre-existing societal discourses on excrement disposal are invoked in a description that adds to the rhetorical image of the 'other' as being something that is out of place. Successful joking adds a rhetorical layer to this process. Here are some examples:

> Q: How long does it take a black lady to shit?
> A: 9 months
> (Black One Liners, no date)

This joke directly labels the child of a black woman as 'shit'. Another version follows:

> Q) What is it called when a black women is in labour?
> A) Constipation
> (Blackjokes.net, no date)

A reversal of the question posed in the previous joke sees a black woman in labour as the major premise, before using the image of constipation as the minor premise, which works in much the same way as the previous example to support racism.

Corporeality and Social Activity

This third section outlines how certain social activities or habits are designated as the activities of black people because of their supposed increased corporeality. These are, first, their increased sporting ability, second, their increased criminality and, third, their increased indolence. These elements of the civilisation/nature dichotomy classify the corporeality of the 'other' in the context of distinctly cultural practice, and so appear culturally racist.

The first appears in discourses of black people having superior athletic ability and a number of linked assumptions concerning the sporting ability of other races. St. Louis elaborates:

> Whether it is the reification of a fundamental African American athletic prowess (Hoberman, 1997), the archetypal tactical ingenuity of white athletes (Burfoot, 1999), or the naturalistic mythology attached to Kenyan distance runners (Bale, 1999; Maguire, 1999), sport can be used to ... reinforce *embodied racial pathologies*. (2003: 3. Emphasis added)

In embodied racism the black race are not credited with the possession of high or even mediocre levels of intelligence. As St. Louis outlines, the black race *are* credited with 'athletic prowess' and this is usually conceptualised in terms of possessing increased strength or power, and also endurance. Despite this, as soon as racialized descriptions of sporting ability require the inclusion of any 'tactical ingenuity', of intelligence, white athletes are asserted as superior. As tactical ingenuity is a condition of the mind, of thought and intelligence, this belief supports the binary mind/body split of embodied racism (St. Louis, 2003, 2005b). Because intelligence and corporeality are dichotomised, the identification of one will metaphorically negate the other. Below is an example from the US context:

> Q: What do you call one white guy surrounded by 10 black guys?
> A: The quarterback.
> (BlackJokes.net, no date)

In American football the position of quarterback, as leader of the offence, is considered the most complex position to play, and until recently, professional quarterbacks were almost always white athletes, as racist attitudes saw black athletes as lacking the intelligence needed to play the position. This belief is rhetorically expressed in the joke despite the now numerous black professional quarterbacks of high ability. A second joke from a US website depicts black intellectual failing and sporting prowess in relation to basketball:

> Q. What do u call a black guy that goes to college?
> A. a basketball player
> (D.J. Sinc, 2004)

Here the minor premise 'explains' that the black man is not intelligent enough to go to college unless he attends on a sports scholarship. The joke works subtly by simply rearticulating the dichotomy in a comic realm. The incongruity developed in this joke is not as sharp as it is in many jokes, and so the joke functions as a form of 'true' humour. Once again the truth criteria of joking does not require vigorous analysis, even in 'true' humour, and so the joke can work without a great deal of scrutiny to reinforce the mind/body dichotomy.

Overall, it is clear that the corporeality/sport dichotomy, through describing the black 'other' as less intelligent, designates the racial group as insignificant or inferior. In this dichotomy there is a simultaneous rhetorical support of the intelligence stereotype, as the logic of the binary will not allow for both characteristics to be possessed by the same race. The logic follows that, while the black race are included in society, they are inferior, but thankfully they are put to good use. The presentation of the binary in joking rhetorically supports this image.

The next group of jokes that I examine focus on depicting the 'other' as criminal. This is principally a cultural characteristic, but we will see that it also connects to embodied racism. Below is an example:

> Q: Why are black peoples hands white?
> A: Because there always leening up against cop cars.
> [sic] (BlackJokes.net, no date)

This joke simply explains bodily difference through criminal activity. It connects blackness and criminality with one another and so ideologically essentializes the connection in a second-order racist discourse. The body of the 'other' is simply different because it is deviant. Here is another:

> Q: Why are all black people fast?
> A: Because the slow ones are in jail.
> (ibid)

This second example presents the stereotype of sporting ability as the major premise before introducing the criminality stereotype as the minor premise, thus rhetorically negating the positive element of the major (sporting) premise. A last example does much the same thing, but with less emphasis on positive characteristics (or their negation):

> Q: What's faster then a black guy running down the street with your TV?
> A: His brother behind with the VCR
> [sic] (BlackJokes.net, no date)

In a final group of jokes the 'other' is described as lazy. In these examples, social inactivity is given an embodied dimension as causal explanation. For example:

> Q: What does a black person have in common with a soda machine?
> A: They both don't work and always take your money.
> (ibid)

In what is a very common joke style, the black person becomes socially useless and unreliable, and a financial burden to boot. Black people are simply lazy; it is a possession of their body. The next example places embodied and cultural racism in the minor premise:

> Q: What are three things you can't give a black person?
> A: A black eye, a fat lip and a job.
> (ibid)

In this joke, social habits are placed next to bodily characteristics, which might serve to essentialize all three characteristics inside the rhetorical device. Another example presents a more absurd version of the stereotype:

> Q: What's the difference between Bigfoot and a hard working black man?
> A: Bigfoot has been spotted
> (ibid)

These brief examples show how the dichotomies of embodied racism also connect to cultural racism, creating a flexible plethora of racist joking possibilities. More examples of cultural racism and embodied racism interacting will be introduced in the next chapter.

Conclusion

I have presented a dual logic in racist humour that depicts, first, the inclusion of the 'other' through inferiorization and, second, the exclusion of the 'other' through expulsion. In both logics, 'black' forms a connotative signifier in embodied racism. As a principle binary division in embodied racism, it allows for the mass classification or racialization of the 'other'. Alongside this, 'nigger' forms a highly pejorative and denotative master signifier for embodied racism. I conceptualised non-stereotyped jokes - those that do not directly express the dichotomies of embodied racism - but do express the exclusionary logic and proteophobia, principally through a number of images of refuse categorisation and disposal. These jokes offer rhetorical support for the exclusionary logic of embodied racism. After this, we saw how the second logic - inferiorization - appears in racist dichotomies. Dichotomous racist stereotypes are prone to what Bauman calls 'ambivalence' because, as binary arrangements, they set up a number of cognitive pressures/impossibilities. These binaries focus on the intelligence, sexuality and corporeality of the 'other'. I argued that racist humour serves to

rhetorically support, or resolve the emerging anxiety, incongruity or ambivalence of such dichotomies.

Embodied racism thrives in humour, with its own internal logics and external connections to cultural racism and nationalism. Overall though, the central finding of this chapter is that the content that receives rhetorical strengthening in embodied racist humour would, when successful, act as a rhetorical palliative for the cognitive failure of embodied racism. Embodied racism inherently produces anxiety and incongruity because of its dichotomous construction and this is refracted in embodied racist humour.

Chapter Four

'Cultural Racism' and Humour

Introduction

In the last chapter I outlined how embodied racist humour rhetorically supports embodied racism through the expression of a dual logic of inferiorization and exclusion. The first is achieved through supporting dichotomies, the second through expressing proteophobia. I argued the effect of humour on racism is specifically produced by the rhetorical incongruities that structure humour. This chapter examines a similar set of processes in humour that contains cultural racism, by analysing the culturally racist logics that appear in humour, their connections to other forms of prejudice and embodied racism, and the connections to Bauman's thesis on the ambivalence produced by order-building systems.

The chapter begins with a critical discussion of cultural racism as that which demarcates between groups and discriminates against an 'other' on the basis of an identification of cultural difference, rather than the bodily encoding or race difference that constitutes embodied racism. Cultural racism is subsumed under the category of a modern order-building system, as outlined by Bauman, because it attempts to order post-racial perceptions, and in doing so, creates logics that manage the image of the cultural 'other'. This section also highlights the connections between cultural racism and other forms of prejudice. After this, I discuss whether racist humour is a problem specific for and of the working classes.

I outline three rhetorical themes that appear in humorous co-agitators, which in specific readings have the functional effect of supporting cultural racism. The first rhetorical theme develops from cultural racism being a form of coded racism that appears in response to the increasing unacceptability of embodied racism. This task negotiates the attitudes of acceptability and unacceptability. The second task deals with a negotiation of national territory that fixates on the maintenance, and fears the transgression of national boundaries. This anxiety is created from issues of space and exclusion in cultural racism, focusing on those 'others' that move to the 'wrong' side of the boundary, and is a proteophobic concern that enforces the exclusionary logic of racism. Third, cultural racism encourages an ambivalence of social identity that

negotiates the competing categories of the 'other' as an alien and a neighbour. This is generated by the presence of the 'other' in the immediate social location and employs stereotypes of cultural and linguistic practice. This task tends to focus on the logic of inferiorization through knowledge of the 'other' culture.

The expression of each rhetorical theme occurs in British stand-up comedy. This is highlighted with examples from, in alphabetical order, the comedians Jim Bowen (2003), Jim Davidson[32] (1980, 1982, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005a, c2005b), Jimmy Jones (1981, 1992), Bernard Manning (1984), Mike Reid (1993, 1995) and to a lesser extent, Frank Carson (1993), Jethro (1993, 1996, 1999, 2002) and Freddie Starr (1995).[33] I also draw on culturally racist jokes that originate on the internet where relevant. Overall, these jokes appear in the British context. They do not contain the same dichotomous elements of the post-slavery US humour of Chapter Three, but rather form a case study of culturally racist characteristics in a specifically British context.

Defining Cultural Racism

Sociologists have used a number of terms to describe cultural racism, all of which emphasise either a particular characteristic or a particular point of historical emergence. It was labelled 'new racism' by Barker (1981) because of its supposed newness in relation to biological racism, which he argued, it had replaced as the dominant formation. The 'neo racism' of Balibar (1991) represents the French nomenclature and describes a similar phenomenon. 'Cultural racism' appears as an accurate and descriptive coinage in Modood's work, principally because he views cultural racism as something that is not particularly new and suggests it has existed for as long as, if not longer than, processes of immigration (1997: 155) The label 'differentialist racism' also appears in some accounts and highlights that it is cultural difference that is of principle

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[32] I have mentioned that there are a number of overlaps between embodied and cultural racism, and will continue to identify these in this chapter. Jim Davidson expresses both embodied and cultural racism, and so is mentioned in both Chapter Three and Four. This sees him act as a 'node' for both discourses and is more probably caused by the volume of material he has produced rather than him being particularly unique in attitude or material.

[33] As an aside, there are comedians who can be said to belong to this genre who do not express racism. Examples of comedians who are not discussed here include Roy 'Chubby' Brown and Les Dawson. Both Brown and Dawson do articulate gender based material that would produce sexist and misogynistic readings and in both cases this tends to form a large part of their act, but they do not express racism.

concern in cultural racism, rather than the hierarchalisation of difference that is evident in traditional racisms.

In summary, all accounts describe a racism that discriminates on the basis of cultural difference rather than race difference and so implies that '*culture can also function like a nature*' (Balibar, 1991: 22. Original emphasis). Farley defines it as following the argument 'that minorities have developed cultural characteristics that in some way place them at a disadvantage. In more extreme forms, this view holds that groups are culturally inferior' (1988: 133). Because of its emphasis on culture, it is often seen as a racism that moves away from, or disguises a belief in a biological basis to racism. Balibar explains this:

> It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incomparability of life-styles and traditions... (1991: 21)

Balibar's comments echo Wieviorka's image of the dual logic of racism - through the issues of exclusionary frontiers and incomparable (read inferior or troublesome) cultures. From this, with its logic comparable to embodied racism, something more needs to be said on how it differs from and interacts with culturalism and embodied racism.

Theorists have argued that biological racism often existed before, and led to the development of cultural racism (Fanon, 1967: 32-3; Modood, 1997: 155). It is often argued that cultural racism represents a *replacement* for biological racism because the latter had become increasingly unacceptable in the post-Holocaust, post-colonial, multicultural period. Barker argues that cultural racism developed after World War II as an alternative discourse due to a general discreditation and disgust with biological racism, and that in the UK this was especially prevalent in Conservative Party discourse of the mid 1970s (Barker, 1981). Cook and Clarke argue that it 'started at the turn of the century and whose latest phase dates at least from 1962' (1990: 134). Gilroy and Balibar suggest a similar dating. Gilroy argues that cultural racism represents a post-war form of racism (1993: 44), and Balibar suggests:

> The new racism is a racism of the era of 'decolonisation', of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a single political space... [and] fits into a framework of 'racism without races'. (1991: 21)

This represents a second characteristic of cultural racism that is usually accepted, after it being a system of prejudice developed through cultural difference, and concerns the situational perspective in which the culture of the 'other' is viewed, which is the home territory of the post-war period. Therefore, in the multicultural context, where cultural difference is acknowledged, racism has the chance and material to form a backlash, and a new configuration as cultural racism.[34]

These arguments suggest that cultural racism develops in social situations where there is a history of embodied racism. These arguments are usually applied to political discourse, but as we saw in Chapter Three, embodied racism is not extinct in humour, and so I do not argue that cultural racism represents a replacement for it in joking. Rather, embodied and cultural racism represent equal and available racist resources for the content of humour, but emerge in situations that best suit their application.

It is useful to highlight the idea of cultural racism as one that can discriminate against 'physical appearance or ancestry but does not require any form of biological determinism' (Modood, 2005b: 12), because embodied racism is not always present in jokes that contain cultural racism. However, cultural racism is not something that directly attaches itself to, or replaces embodied racism, even though it can do so in some instances. Overall, I do not argue that embodied racism and cultural racism have a uniform causal connection.

Culturalism is often defined as a type of discrimination that has no basis in biology and makes no reference to it, and so represents a form of discrimination that would only require the existence of cultural difference. This leaves only an incremental difference between certain instances of cultural racism (without embodied racism) and culturalism. I overcome this by qualifying and critiquing cultural racism as a descriptive concept through the use of more specific nomenclature. Therefore, as the chapter develops I will deconstruct the concept of culturally racist humour into smaller joke themes. This deconstruction will highlight the overall similarity of 'othering' processes involved in

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[34] Despite this, the general themes of cultural racism can be seen to have some historical ubiquity. In not wanting to overemphasise the specificity of cultural racism in the post-colonial context, Balibar's comment that '[a] racism which does not have the pseudo-biological concept of race as its main driving force has always existed... Its prototype is anti-Semitism' (1991: 23), provides a useful marker for this point. Although there are obvious historical points at which anti-Semitism *is* an embodied racism, and it might be argued that this is specifically when it becomes most problematic.

humour that contain embodied and cultural racism, culturalism, ethnic prejudice, nationalism, xenophobia and immigrational prejudice.

A final area of discussion focuses on the identification of the groups that are subjected to cultural racism. Modood (1997: 156-60) describes how, in the British context, different racisms have tended to affect different ethnic groups and suggests that colour racism, is often, in this context, aimed at black or Afro-Caribbean ethnic groups whereas cultural racism tends to attack British Asians. He argues 'the racialized images of Asians is not so extensively linked to physical appearance. It very soon appeals to cultural motifs such as language, religion, family structures, exotic dress, cuisine, and art forms' (Modood, 2005b: 7), and that 'Asians suffer a double or a compound racism' (ibid). This compound racism exists because, for Modood, racism aimed at black and Afro-Caribbeans is primarily a form of colour racism, whereas that aimed at Asians also contains an element of colour racism but is primarily constructed as a cultural racism. As was shown in Chapter Three, embodied racism tends to be used in humour to describe black minorities. This chapter will show that cultural racism appears to focus on Asians in the main, but that embodied racism often appears as a part of this humour. Despite this, Modood's idea of a 'double racism' is not supported in my argument because there is no basis on which to suggest that this joking is any more, or less, rhetorically severe or successful. Both types express and support the dual logic of racism - exclusion and inferiorization - which is perhaps a sturdier means on which to judge the impact. Take for example, the anti-Muslim internet based joke below:

> (Q) Why Do MUSLIM Women Cover Their Faces?
> (A) They think Cover-up means Cover Girl.
> (A) To hide their Bad Breath.
> (A) To hide the Camel Piss stains on their teeth.
> (A) To avoid public ridicule for being so fucking ugly.
> (A) To hide the fact they are Inbred Baboon decedents.
> (A) To avoid being a look alike Martha Stewart Clone Doll.
> (A) To hide their shame they are a Muslim and part of the biggest group of terrorist in the world.
> (sic) (Jack's Muslim Jokes, 2005)

Importantly, as the above joke shows, one contemporary form of racism is anti-Muslim. It attacks Muslims but also leads to a general increase in racism towards all British Asians (The Runnymede Trust, 1997; Modood, 2005b). Focusing on terrorism, Gilroy explains how in the contemporary setting this represents a new depiction of the 'other':

> As Islamophobia has increasingly shaped public debate and the figure of the traitor/terrorist has emerged to hold hands with the other well-worn iconic

> representations of imminent racial chaos and disorder: the street criminal, the scrounger and the illegal immigrant. (2005: 433)

This formation of cultural racism and its internal dichotomies appears in some humour. The previous joke is certainly an extreme and crude example of anti-Muslim racism. It is, however, very difficult to distinguish how the cultural, embodied and political characteristics or depictions mentioned in it can be separated or prioritised in relation to a compound racism and how this combination of elements make the racism any worse than the purely embodied racism seen in Chapter Three. Moreover, because black minorities are subjected to embodied and cultural racism (this was illustrated at the end of Chapter Three, but biological racism also *always* contained moral and cultural distinctions [Rattansi, 2007: 31]), they too suffer from a compound racism, but one that is reversed, and so I do not argue that British Asians represent an unusual case.

Is Racist Humour a Working Class Problem?

Before I discuss the central rhetorical themes preformed by culturally racist humour, I discuss the perceived habitus conditions of the comedians involved in its articulation. The habitus of any humour audience and those involved in creating and viewing racist internet joking is impossible to describe in textual research of this kind. Despite this, the comedians themselves and the content of the material can be approximately located in relation to socio-cultural structural characteristics, which hint at their appeal for certain audiences.

The comedians examined in this chapter - Jim Bowen, Frank Carson, Jim Davidson, Jethro, Jimmy Jones, Bernard Manning, Mike Reid and Freddie Starr - are all male and either from a working class background or have come to prominence via the 'workingmen's club circuit'. Davidson is mentioned more than any other because he is the most commercially successful, and has produced far more material. Some, especially Bowen, Davidson, Manning and Jones, reached the peak of their popularity in the 1970s and 1980s. While some theorists argue that it is irrelevant to ask whether racist theories emerge from what might be described as the 'elites' or the 'masses' (see Balibar, 1991: 18-19), it does appear that a very specific socio-structural group is involved in the production of this humour. There are two possible explanations for this. First, in a bottom-up manner, habitus conditions may encourage the production of this type of humour. Second, in a top-down manner, this type of humour might be a 'culture industry' product that is aimed at a mass audience. A realistic explanation remains

somewhere between the two and has wider sociological implications - as Miles writes: 'we have only limited evidence of the nature and extent of racist ideologies amongst the working class' (1989: 80).

The rationale I present to explain this issue is one that follows Miles' thesis on the racialization of minority groups in the labour market. Miles explains how employers 'believe not only that the labour market consisted of a number of different 'races' but also that these 'races' had different characteristics which influenced their employability' (ibid). So, when he argues that '[s]ince the 1950s, the British labour market has been racialised…' (ibid: 126), we can assume that the white working classes will have specific relationships to these racializations, which are connected to the maintenance or improvement of employment position in the labour market. Maintaining a position in the labour market can involve excluding or inferiorizing the 'other', who is seen as a threat to ordered/current employability. This is achieved through proteophobia and stereotyping, and is seen as a process of anxiety negotiation for which racist humour is especially useful. Despite this, the humour is ultimately useless for improving labour conditions.

Coupled with this idea is the expression, which appears in the humour and is mentioned in this chapter, that working class people feel increasingly stereotyped, marginalised, stigmatised and de-valued, both economically and culturally. Rattansi (2007) outlines this sentiment: 'complaints that whites have become second-class citizens in their own countries have a wide resonance' (2007: 167). These sentiments do not exist in abstraction from the material conditions of the working classes, who are affected by a number of global economic and social changes of recent decades:

> The increasing powers of supra-national entities such as the European Union, the forces of economic globalization which have involved the outsourcing of jobs to India and China, and the threat of a resurgent, militant global Islam are creating conditions in which broad cultural and political coalitions are being united by varying degrees of nationalism. (ibid: 167)

While Rattansi aligns these events to a united 'nationalism', many English working class people see their own sense of nationalism as something that has been stigmatized and repressed in the post-colonial period, especially by the political Left, and this, coupled with the relative success of anti-racist discourse in rendering racism increasingly unacceptable, and the linked establishment of multiculturalism, presents the conditions for a resentment fuelled and politically motivated working class racism. As expressions of these sentiments also increasingly fall under the remit of

unacceptable discourse, humour provides an alternative and rhetorical vehicle of expression.

In presenting this argument, I do not want to exaggerate the class based differences in the enjoyment of racist comedy, as the architects of alternative comedy also produced racist humour. Such comedians enjoy a far greater reputation today in middle class circles than the stand-up comedians mentioned. For example, Peter Cook, Peter Sellars and Spike Milligan all produced racist humour. Specifically, Cook's expressions of embodied racism in *Derek and Clive,* Sellars' hit song *Goodness Gracious Me* (with Sophia Loren) and Milligan's 'Paki Paddy' in *Curry and Chips* are all problematic. Although it is possible to argue that this humour is more polysemic than the stand-up and internet sources discussed in this and the previous chapter, usually because it is expressed through impersonation or character acting, it does produce racist readings. I do not include this material in the thesis because its age and accessibility pushes it outside of my remit of contemporary expressions. The thesis remains an investigation of popular and contemporary racist humour, rather than an historical account of racist humour.

Three Rhetorical Themes in Cultural Racism

Returning to Bauman's ideas on the creation of societal 'others', cultural racism, like embodied racism, is an order-building discourse that relies on a series of rhetorical themes that help strengthen the truth status of the discourse. As Bauman argues, such order-building discourse necessarily develops cognitive failure and generates ambivalence, ambiguity, incongruity and anxiety. Bauman explains racism as 'a theory of ascription to redeem boundary drawing and boundary-guarding concerns under new conditions which made boundary-crossing easier than ever before' (2000b: 212-13). Cultural racism can be seen to serve this function. In describing the effect of the 'other' that racism processes, Bauman describes how the 'other' makes,

> ... obscure what ought to be transparent, confuse what ought to be a straightforward recipe for action, and/or prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying... they pollute the joy with anxiety while making the forbidden fruit alluring... in other words, they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen. (1997b: 17)

As stated, there are three rhetorical themes outlined in this chapter. The first centres on the removal or lack of biological heritage in cultural racism and an associated

negotiation or prescription of acceptability - of the presentation of the argument that the discourses are not racist. This is a dichotomy that centres on traversing the attitudes of acceptability and unacceptability, in which cultural racism will attempt a coding or considered, reflexive expression of its meaning in order to avoid criticism and appear as acceptable, legitimate discourse. Humour will aid this task in two ways. First, there is the placement of cultural racism in a comic frame that is not serious and so, to employ Freud's terminology, an expression of tendentious discourse with a lower level of social disapprobation. Second, the rhetorical devices of humour provide key coding mechanisms which confuse and multiply meaning and interpretation, and so help to hide racism.

The second rhetorical theme focuses on frontiers, which, in my analysis, are highlighted as the dichotomous nature of national boundaries, but this can be extended to include a number of regional or super-national boundaries. The 'other' who moves into the home territory across the national frontier can create racist anxiety. Humour offers a rhetorical expression of this anxiety and a resolution of the 'problem' through an imaginary placement of the 'other' in the 'correct' category. As Marotta suggests in a Baumanesque analysis, '[t]he Other or the stranger, from the perspective of the will-to-order, epitomizes chaos and thus is a potential threat to the stable and fixed boundaries' (2002: 39). Cultural racism represents a reductionist account of the incompatibility of different cultures, and in its worst form, is a racism that sees cultural segregation as necessary (Miles, 1989: 62-4). In humour, the theme of segregation is given rhetorical strength through its enactment in the realm of linguistic fantasy. This appears as the expression of proteophobia in culturally racist joking. These jokes move through various types of segregation, which include preventing the arrival, the removal, and in the most extreme form, the death of the cultural 'other'. Each stage of proteophobia can allow an additional rhetorical strengthening, aside from that resolution offered in co-agitation, by removing the 'other' that is responsible for its generation. Once again, while coupled with humorous co-agitators, they provide a strengthened rhetorical resolution of the 'problems' confronted by cultural racism.

The third rhetorical task involves personal identity and inferiorization of the 'other'. Bauman describes an ambivalence of identity, which he labels the 'privatisation of strangerhood'. This is also offered resolution in culturally racist humour. Cultural racism presents the urge to keep cultures distinct, and separate the presence of the culture of the 'other' in the home territory. It also shows concern for the influence and hybrid mixing of the culture of the 'other'. The privatisation of strangerhood is

perpetuated by these concerns, and so this ambivalence focuses on life-style practices and traditions, and can be seen to negotiate the categories of the 'other' as alien and neighbour in a style that leads to the inferiorization of the culture of the 'other'. The cultural characteristics that are focused on include language use, custom, dress, cuisine and religion.

The ambivalences of cultural racism and embodied racism both share the similar logics of exclusion and inclusion, and the tropes that accompany each. What differs in cultural racism is, first, an increased emphasis on the 'acceptability' of expression and, second, a replacement of the 'natural' but savage 'other' with one that *has* cultural beliefs but a culture dangerously different than the home culture. Of course, and as I state throughout, there remains a great deal of overlap between embodied and culturally racist expressions in actual social contexts.

1) Cultural Racism as Coded Racism - The Ambivalence of Acceptability in Humour

Cultural racism is often described as a form of coded racism that has had some success in outwitting anti-racist critique (Balibar, 1991; Miles, 1989: 84-7; Modood, 2005b: 11). This coding presents the rationale that cultural racism is not racist because it does not rely on embodied sign-systems and hierarchy, and, from this, it articulates genuine non-racist concerns about the consequences of cultural mixing. It has been described as a sophisticated discursive reworking of older racism that avoids critique focused on race as the concept underlying racism. Balibar calls this the 'turn about effect' of cultural racism (1991: 23). This 'turn about', which is inflicted on the discourses of anti-racism, allows social actors using cultural racism to assert that they are simply not racist because cultural separation, rather than race separation, is not an act based on race prejudice, but a natural and beneficial commonsense policy that has benefits for all groups. It therefore has a particular rhetorical argument that might entice social actors who shy away from embodied racism.

These arguments are expressed in humour, where rhetorical devices can be employed to aid the coding exercise. Coding is evident in the articulation of any of the dichotomies of cultural racism (without embodied referents) in humour. Importantly

though, there are specific techniques of 'acceptability' in racist humour that work in addition to the ostensive placement of culturally racist signs inside jokes.

In a number of early performances from comedians in this genre there is little attempt at coding or disguising racism (e.g. Davidson, 1980, 1982; Jones, 1981, 1993 [1982]). In many later performances, overt racism has been replaced with a more subtle form. Davidson exemplifies this in a 2001 performance:

> You know that farmer that shot that guy? It's a tragic incident and I don't know all the facts, all I know is he'd have been more useful in Zimbabwe training their fucking farmers than he would. Yeah, no don't get me wrong, I don't want that to sound racist, cos I get accused of that sometimes you know because I don't do things like Red Nose Day. You never see me do Comic Relief do you? And I'll tell you why. I was asked once to help and I thought about helping the starving Ethiopians and then I thought, fuck-um. No, no, I don't wish, I don't wish to be rude, *"he's a racist"* [Davidson affecting a woman's voice]. I just think, there's an old saying, give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach him to fish, feed a man for life, right? Now these poor Ethiopians live in a fucking desert, nothing grows. How long are they going to take to realise that fuck-all grows in a desert?... I'd like to have red, white and blue nose day. That's what I'd like to have, so you have British people of all different colours, we're a multi-racial society, so lets look after all the different people in our country. It's a bit sad I think when we give millions of pounds away but yet old-age pensioners can't put two electric bars on their fire at Christmas. That's me, that's the way I look at it. I think the world's gone upside down. Have, we have all these illegal immigrants coming in don't we. It's a fucking nightmare. I'm sure, why the fuck they want to come here I've no idea. It amazes me why they want to fucking come and they don't stay in France do they? *"Welcome to France"* [French accent]. "No fuck we go to England", and now they're not even being arrested are they? They're not being arrested, thousands of them. (2001e)

As in many other examples from Davidson's performances, the actual punch lines and jokes are quite difficult to locate once the material has been transcribed. In this example the punch lines or points of laughter occur when the discourse becomes more exaggerated, for example after the comment on training white Zimbabwean farmers to shoot, after the 'fuck-um' comment and after the 'fuck-all grows in a desert' comment. As well as the obvious use of exaggeration, which forms a humorous trope (Berger, 1995a: 54), the text is also interrupted by incongruity with the use of various accents and voice changes, which takes the form of caricature and stereotyping (ibid: 54-5). It is, therefore, clearly a comic extract that receives laughter from the audience. While there are a number of humour tropes at work in the text, there are also a number of rhetorical techniques employed to 'hide' racism and support the views expressed. The first, and most obvious, is the use of prolepsis, which is the anticipation of criticism. In this example it forms the anticipation of being called racist. Davidson presents the criticism in advance and then builds a response to it, which are jokes that seek to ridicule the anti-racist position (and his leftwing alternative comic rivals). Once this

defence has been undertaken, Davidson turns to the issues of inferiorization and exclusion that I focus on later. He acknowledges that Britain is a 'multi-racial society', before going on to berate illegal immigrants, which invokes Bauman's comment that in racism the 'other' is now often acknowledged as being 'here to stay' (1997a: 54), as a neighbour, but is also presented as a troublesome alien and potential boundary transgressor. Davidson's use of prolepsis and the expression that Britain is a multi-racial society genuinely confuse the claim that the extract is racist - it could be read as an expression of the dilemmatic - of what Billig describes as the ambivalence of racist expression (Billig et al, 1988). Davidson's comments are also a reflection of the working class racism outlined above, which expresses genuine socio-economic resentment, in this case in the call for a 'red, white and blue' nose day, but because of the culturally racist terms used, this has a self-defeating tendency within it and cannot form legitimate political expression. What is also expressed in the text is the idea of an 'immigrational prejudice' that can be seen as a subsection of racism (and is often seen as a key element of cultural racism) and xenophobia.

Bowen (2003), in a stand-up show entitled *You Can't Tell These Anymore!*, dedicates a full performance to the topic of jokes that can no longer be told because of the influence of political correctness. He employs tropes for either coding racism or distancing the perceived, intended meaning from any racist readings that might be elicited. In one example he specifically addresses the subject of racist humour and offence:

> Course you've got to be very careful now you know, you can't just romp on about anything, you have to be very careful. You can't tell racist, sexist, feminist jokes. You can't do any of them jokes. Like I mentioned the Scots earlier, you mus'unt do that, cos that's racist. Can't do it. And any Scots people in here tonight will be mortally offended if I was to tell the story about the drunken Scotsman who'd gone up to heaven, knocked on the gates and St Peter said, "who's that" and the Scotsman said, *"it's Angus McTavish"* [Scottish accent]. St Peter said, "you can piss off, we're not making porridge for one". You see, it's it's like the Welsh, how many Welsh people in? I hate the bastards, I hate the bastards. More than five and you've got a bloody choir on your hands... You've just got to be very, very careful haven't you? And it goes in circles doesn't it? In cycles, fashion, fashion. Got the alternative comedians now where you've got to think whether it's funny or not, you've got to say, "was that funny? Am I supposed to laugh or what? Have I got I got to be intelligent or can I be thick and watch basic stuff?" (2003)

Offering a discussion of racism and political correctness, Bowen seeks to 'address' some of the issues that are at stake in the telling of racist humour. Throughout this show, Bowen makes reference to older comedians and the material they used, and to the present state of comedy, where he emphasises how it has changed since the 1970s.

This example is interesting because, through a number of comic tropes, Bowen creates a humorous critique of politically correct attitudes to racist humour. Throughout the show Bowen creates an incongruity through the acknowledgement of the need to be 'very careful' and not offend, and the juxtaposed articulation of the offensive discourse. In this example, Bowen begins by outlining the situation - that racist humour cannot be told (along with sexist and 'feminist' humour, for which he means gender based humour rather than jokes told by feminists) - before giving an example of humour that is not racist (a joke about the Scottish). By providing this example, and suggesting that the Scots would be 'morally offended', he employs the comic trope of exaggeration (Berger, 1995a: 54), and allows the politically correct attitude to be judged absurd through this mis-comparison. By telling a joke that is relatively inoffensive and not racist, Bowen is able to continue this exaggeration and to render criticism at those who find racist humour offensive. The joke finishes with the continued use of mockery, through an analysis of the humour of the politically correct - alternative comedy - which is seen as intellectual, of questionable humorousness, and rigid in the Bergsonian image of humour, which renders the enterprise of alternative comedy as a joke in itself. This comment also expresses the sentiment of the working class racism, that their culture is devalued in the face of alternative comedy. Overall, through the use of a combination of incongruities and comic devices Bowen is able to show the 'unacceptability' of his humour to be absurd and firmly establishes his comedy in an 'acceptable' category. This clears the way for more explicit expressions of racism.

In the next example, Bowen tells a culturally racist joke in the third person, by recounting its original telling by Ken Goodwin. This joke draws on the theme of the 'other' crossing national boundaries, which will be looked at in detail below. It is the distancing of intentionality that I highlight here:

> Do you remember another guy on *The Comedians* called Ken Goodwin? Do you remember Ken? Lovely man, lovely man. I'm going to tell you this story; we did Blackpool last year at the Opera House. It was lovely and Ken was on, and these stories, politically, they're so incorrect it's not true and I couldn't believe Ken is still doing the same act he was doing in 1970, and he's still wearing the same bloody suit he was wearing... And Ken went on, talk about innocent comedy, and it's all, we're only comics... And I couldn't believe what he did; he'd done the same every week... But then he went on, this is only last year. It was full, the Opera House, he said, "I was very big abroad you know, I was very popular in Pakistan. I was so popular thousands of them have come over here to watch me". And then he said, he carried on, I thought what's he saying, "I've got some bad news for people who live in Birmingham. Bus fairs have gone up two Rupees". (2003)

Bowen introduces Goodwin as 'innocent', the experience of performance in Blackpool as 'lovely' and uses a variation of an 'it's only a joke' rhetorical excuse, by suggesting 'we're only comics'. This line is used throughout the show to highlight the material and enterprise of the comedian as harmless. By doing this, Bowen is able to downplay the intentionality of Goodwin's racism, which is expressed in two jokes. His own intentionality is defended by the use of the third person account. Davidson (1980) has also used a similar technique for repeating Irish jokes told by other comedians. Overall, this extract uses these devices to make the two proceeding jokes acceptable or harmless, which deal with issues of boundary crossing and cultural change.

2) National Identity and Boundary Maintenance - Space and Exclusion in Humour

The second rhetorical theme that seeks resolution in culturally racist humour focuses on the 'other' as a transgressor of national boundaries. This is primarily an ambivalence or anxiety generated if the 'other' is perceived to cross these boundaries, and becomes the subject of humour coupled with proteophobic expression. In being connected to nationalism, it is one of the more prominent subjects of cultural racism.

Parekh summarises the culturally racist view of nationalism and boundary maintenance, obsessed with the idea of national decline, that consists of beliefs that see a 'loss of national identity, a weakening of the sense of patriotism and the decline of public culture and spirit' (1986: 34). The perspective of this 'weakened' Britishness is reasserted and attached to an image of a natural or essential British culture (ibid: 35). Importantly, Parekh describes culturally racist constructions of Britishness as incoherent. He states that it 'is so obviously incoherent and confused that, had it not found some support in influential circles, one would leave it alone to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions' (ibid: 38-9). What such commentators miss is that this incoherence can be rhetorically supported or resolved by humour, which helps prevent its 'collapse'.[35]

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[35] While I concentrate on culturally racist joking that specifically focuses on boundary crossing, these comedians also produce a number of jokes that draw on national stereotypes, some of which are examined in the next section. It is possible to argue that national characteristics are placed in humour for similar functional purposes. Here is an example from Reid:

The 'others' who transgress national boundaries are described in several ways - the asylum seeker, the illegal immigrant, the refugee and the immigrant worker. Balibar proposes that cultural racism will actually substitute arguments of race for those of immigration (1991: 20), as a part of its coding exercise. He argues that '[t]he functioning of the category of *immigration* [acts] as a substitute for the notion of race' (ibid. emphasis in original). Bauman adds similarly that the 'concerns with boundary-drawing and boundary maintenance tend to focus today in most Western countries on immigrant workers' (2000b: 226), while Parekh provides a neat paraphrase of this culturally racist logic:

> Their presence erodes the unity of national sentiment and subverts Britain's sense of nationhood. The British feel deeply threatened by them and fear for their unity and integrity as a nation. They cannot be blamed for feeling this way for it is inherent in 'human nature' to wish to live with men and women of one's kind. (1986: 37)

A close connection exists between the themes of nationalism, xenophobia, immigrational prejudice, and the logic of exclusionary racism in this humour. This 'othering' does not have to follow either strict 'racial' lines or be applied to the usual suspects of cultural racism, and so those subjected to it do not need to embody the characteristics of old colonial subjects in order to become the victims and focus of cultural racism. As Gilroy explains, '[e]ven if they are 'white', they can be held hostage by the racialized specification that they are immigrants. Even Poles and Kosovars can project dangerous discomfort into the unhappy consciousness of their fearful and anxious hosts and neighbours' (2005: 435). While Gilroy argues these newcomers provoke memories of lost empire, this is an unnecessary inference for my analysis. The focus on the boundary-crossing 'other', no matter which group, reappears because of the transgression of the boundary that constructs the racist imaginary. This ambivalence of space may or may not have appeared in colonial times, but it is the fixing of cognitive categories that proteophobes desire rather than the return of a specific socio-historical period, which may or may not become attached to this. As Marotta explains 'Nationalism seeks unification and homogeneity and this is achieved through the act of

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> Saddam Hussein, Desert Storm, Jesus, having said that of course, that is one savage regime Saddam Hussein had there. If a man gets caught stealing they cut his right hand off, as you know. If the same geezer gets caught they cut his left hand off. The only thing he can steal after that is fucking doughnuts. Yes operation Desert Storm, we were there, the Yanks. France sent two planes; they got lost on the way. Germans sent 5000 towels to lie on the beach. The Italians surrendered just in case. 160 degrees in the shade and the Irish sent two fucking icebreakers. (1995)

drawing boundaries between natives and aliens' (2002: 42). Once again, Davidson's comedic career provides numerous examples. In a 1982 performance he asks, 'anyone from England? Do you know what, don't you think Great Britain's the best country in the world? Don't you think? Yeah, it's got to be, every other bugger's living here ain't they' (1982). This joke expresses sentiments about any group at anytime because it mentions none. Jethro gives a more extreme example: 'I saw a man in Shepton Mallet pouring petrol over asylum seekers. I said "what are you doing that for?" He said, "you can get fifteen to the gallon"' (2006). This is a more obvious example of proteophobic destruction expressed through absurdity (Berger, 1995a: 54).

The most efficient method of creating waste free social space is simply not to generate waste in the first place, or to not allow the 'other' into social space, to specifically exclude the 'other'. This urge to expel the 'other' appears in Davidson's comedy. On a supposed visit to Iraq, Davidson talks to an Iraqi civilian who mistakes him for Tony Blair.

> This bloke said *"Mr Blair, you Prime Minister, you done fantastic job for our country"* [italics signifies an Arabic accent], I said "what!" *"Mr Blair you done"*, I said "I'm not Mr Blair", *"you tell Mr Blair he done fantastic job for our country"*, I said "we'll he's fucked our country right up!" Do you know what he said? Oh yes, oh yes, um, you know what he said? *"Don't say that I'm going to live there next week"* Now people listening to that might think, "oh here he goes, Jim Davidson doing a racist joke". Now I don't think it's racist cos we're worried about our borders ladies and gentlemen? Do you know what I'm saying? Let me give you, Uncle George is a lorry driver right, drives all round Europe and he got stopped by the British, British right, not French, this is down at Dover, by the British immigration officer. He said to him *"vot have you got on vour lorry?"* [Indian accent] "What?" *"vot have you got on vour lorry?"* He thought shit, I'll own up. He said "I've got forty two Croatian gypsies". He weren't nicked. Do you know what he said? *"Are they on pallets?"* It's a joke. No our blokes are doing a good job with what Iraqis are left in Iraq at the moment. (2003)[36]

[36] Davidson has produced several examples of this joke. In each case the joke changes slightly, often to accommodate the audience that he is performing to - thus highlighting how geography impacts directly on habitus. Here is an example from *Jim Davidson. Uncovered and Uncensored:*

> My mate drives a lorry, right, and he comes back to Dover and the security bloke says "Harry". "Oh what's up Fred? Hello sir, what can I do for you?" *"Vot have you got on vour lorry?"* [Indian accent]. He said *"vot have you got on vour lorry?"* "Oh alright the game's up. I've got fifty two Croatian Gypsies". *"Oh fuck me, are they on pallets?"* That's what's happening, we get accused, British people aren't racist, we want to help people don't we? Fucking stupid. (2001e)

This next example from *Jim's Silver Jubilee,* altered for the Scottish audience, has a different ending:

> And it's got to be said the whole county's gone to rack and fucking ruin, we've got all these illegal bloody asylum seekers coming in the country now. Have you got any here yet? Want any more? My mate's a lorry driver okay, Glaswegian guy.

Davidson covers a lot of ground in this joke; he suggests an influx of Iraqi asylum seekers, attempts to render his humour acceptable, comments on existing British ethnic groups and expresses concern about Eastern European migrants. The joke contains the proteophobic theme. First, the joke depicts a problematic 'other', in the form of the Iraqi that needs to be kept out of British society. Interestingly, noting Bauman's dichotomy of the 'tourist' and 'vagabond' (1997b), the movement of Davidson's 'tourist' self is not judged as disturbing boundaries in the way that the 'other' will. Davidson and the British Army are specifically not depicted as invading, overrunning or illegally visiting Iraq. Secondly, Davidson rhetorically excludes himself from being labelled racist by denying that excessive anxiety over illegal immigration (a common theme of cultural racism) is a racist preoccupation. This again evokes the ambiguity of the working class racism and highlights the problematic terms of expression involved in it. Again, the technique is rhetorical because it begins with the use of prolepsis in anticipation of an accusation of racism and then diverts attention through metonym, towards a particular aspect of Davidson's racism - his obsession with immigration and border control. The joke then moves on to discuss 'Uncle George', who is perhaps the patron saint of British lorry drivers - this resonates with a further chain of patriarchal, British signification, and distinguishes Uncle George from the Asian policing the border. The infiltration of the 'other' into positions of power, which is expressed through the accent and vernacular of the Asian customs officer, is a frequent fear. In this case the 42 Croatian gypsies enter the country because of the ineffective customs officer and represent a fear of the Eastern European 'other'. The joke is proteophobic because it attempts to justify keeping the 'other' at bay, in this instance by preventing their arrival. It again specifically draws on nationalism, xenophobia and immigrational prejudice.

Cuisine can also be linked with proteophobia and exclusion. In the 1982 performance Davidson jokes 'people think there's a lot of Pakistanis in Brixton, there ain't, the West Indians have found out they taste like chicken' (1982). This joke turns

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Lorry driver okay and he drives all the way, comes through Dover everyday. He delivers kitchen utensils. Well actually, the way he makes his money is smuggling tobacco. Ain't it funny the shit you'll smoke because it's cheap. "What you got?" "I've got a fucking load of this stuff, shite, have a look" [both Scottish accents]. "Oh that's fucking shite by the way", "I know but it's fucking cheap but", "but what?" "No I just fucking say but by the way". Smoking it, "give me, fill the boot up with it then. It's fucking cheap, no paying no fucking tax, cough, it's shite, cheap but by the way". And the Doctor says "I'm afraid Mr McDonald you've got cancer", "I might have but I didn'tee fucking pay VAT [Davidson gives V sign]. (2002b, and 2002a used a similar example)

the strangeness of the food of the 'other' back onto the 'other' as a removal technique. The proteophobic fantasy is acted out by the savage West Indians who are able to consume large amounts of the alien Pakistanis, all through an expression of the strangeness of the food of the 'other'.[37] This next joke from Manning focuses on clothing. Although the logic of the joke is a little difficult to decipher, its intention, as a violent joke, is distinctly proteophobic. Manning says 'Pakistani watching television, he said "wear something white at night". Put a white hat on, white coat, white suit, white gloves. Fucking snowplough knocked him down. Unlucky that isn't it' (1984).[38]

This section shows how the logic of exclusion in cultural racism - Bauman's proteophobia - is expressed in a number of styles in culturally racist humour. These include concerns over nationalism, immigration and inventive methods of removal in fantasy that focus on cultural difference. Overall, most examples exhibit the theme of a resentment based working class racism.

3) The 'Other' as Alien and Neighbour - Identity and Inferiorization in Humour

In Bauman's postmodernity there develops a particular ambivalence of identity associated with the 'privatisation of strangerhood' or the 'universalisation of rootlessness' (1991: 94-8). An overlap of the concept of the privatisation of

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[37] Below is a similar example from a Carson performance in 1993:

> Ko Che said to Jeronimo "here's good news and bad news", "what's the bad news", "they're putting six hundred Pakistanis on the reservation", "oh fuck" he said, 'there's no room for six hundred Pakis on the reservation", "yes but there's good news, they taste like chicken" (1993).

This example re-emphasises the specificity of racist humour. While the humorous co-agitator remains the same and the joke has the same structure, the altered content changes the meaning of the joke. The racism is altered somewhat with the use of the Native Americans, who become the savage in this example, rather than the Afro-Caribbean.

[38] The joke below by Manning, which is obviously racist and xenophobic, shows the violence that some of his humour depicts:

> You Japanese never laugh do you, never fucking laugh, do ya ah, never laugh. We've not forgotten Pearl Harbour pal, don't you fucking worry about that. What a fucking shit-house trick that was. He's fucking sat there can't wait to get home and make another Datson. You look like a nice fella, go and piss on that Jap. Bastards. Got no fucking time for them me. There was a plane crash in Madrid about 6 months ago and 200 Japanese on that plane. Broke my fucking heart, six empty seats there were. (1984)

strangerhood in modern and postmodern humour is possible. The concept can also be used to describe the fixation on cultural stereotypes and socio-structural difference in humour. This is developed in an account of how culturally racist humour follows the logic of inferiorization.

Cultural racism makes use of a number of cultural characteristics and stereotypes of the various groups defined as 'other' inside its remit. These differences, which include language use, custom, dress, religion and cuisine, become the focus of humour because they are also used to signify identity, and so specifically connect with any ambivalence of identity that may exist. Humour is able to provide a 'safe haven' for these differences, where their threat to the self is minimised by their impending resolution and inferiorization.

Bauman argues that an ambivalence of identity is now a common existential experience. He describes the privatisation of strangerhood as a phenomenon where, 'the mode of "being a stranger" is experienced to a varying degree, by all and every member of contemporary society with its extreme division of labour and separation of functionally separated spheres' (Bauman, 1991: 94). Such strangerhood can resonate with the working class racism outlined throughout, where divisions of labour and associated practises create alienation and resentment. Strangerhood manifests itself simply because of an increase in social and economic instability and uncertainty. Some commentators have psychologised this process - Marotta interprets Bauman as suggesting that, 'part of the human condition is both the desire for security, which we gain from living in a 'community', and the need for autonomy. These two desires cannot be reconciled nor satisfied simultaneously' (2002: 49). The ambivalence of identity should not just be seen as a psychological affair, but as this *and* a result of changing social and economic conditions. This privatisation of ambivalence is reflected in cultural racism, specifically through a concern to negotiate the presence of the 'other' as both alien and neighbour - to negotiate the *inferiorization of the 'other'* and prevent the inferiorization of the self through the feelings of not belonging, of being the stranger. It is perhaps in racism that such common ambivalences are allowed resolution for those who are least able - because of socio-economic position and uncertainty - to live with them.

I begin to analyse this identity humour with an example that uses differences in language use. Perhaps the most well known case of racist language caricature in British stand-up comedy is Davidson's 'Chalky White' character. Chapter Three saw how the

character draws on a number of racial stereotypes. His accent, that of a stereotypical Afro-Caribbean, also forms a key, if not central, component of the humour. It is often assumed that Davidson now rarely performs the character, but it often appears in a more discreet, coded manner. For example, in a 2002 performance he says,

> What ever happened to those old Chalky jokes? Remember those Chalky jokes? They got all the lefties moaning. I had a great mate called George Campbell. I used to go to school with him in Charlton. We used to play football, 4-4-2 formation. I was the two, me and George. There you are, you've got it in black and white now. And he used to talk like that, "Here Cam" [London accent], me. "Get your fucking act together, pass the fucking ball over". When we left school, six months later I saw him down in Lewisham. He's got dreadlocks put in and a couple of black mates. I said "George, it's me Cam". "*Alright how's it going? Me see you later, we gonna have a few pipes and smoke some ganja"* [West Indian accent]. I said, "what the fuck are you talking like that for George?" He said, "I'm with me mates" [London accent]. I love that story me. People say, "why don't you do Chalky anymore?" Well I do, but there's no real point because no one speaks with a West Indian accent any more, do they? They don't, even West Indians don't, they're all speak with, speak like *Frank Bruno* [performs a Frank Bruno impression while saying 'Frank Bruno'] Do you like Frank Bruno? I do. I love him, I think he's great. I remember on *Capital Radio,* Mike Osmond interviewed him and he said, "Tell me Frank, they tell me you have a detached retina", "*Well we do now but we used to live in a council house"*. When Chalky was a little boy him and his two brothers went as a witness cos they saw some bloke making love to this woman and the husband caught them and he ran off and grabbed them and they had to go to court, and the judge who had no thumbs, his name was just-his fingers, hah ha. That's the bit you can show the children. "Call the first witness"... *"I'm coming"* [West Indian accent], "State your name", *"Leroy White"*, "Tell the court what you saw". *"Yeah your honour, me out with two friends playing football inn't, you know all that and everyting, when all of a sudden we see the white man and the white woman, they're having a fuck"*. He said, "get out of my court", *"I tellin' the truth"*, "do not use that language", *"what the fucks wrong with truth"*, "get out, call the next witness"... "State your name", *"Justin White"*, "tell the court, in your own works, what you saw", *"Oh, I was playing football with me two brothers and me see some fucking going on"*. "Contempt of court", *"Oh that's very nice of you"*, "£50 or fourteen days?" *"I'll take the money"*. He said *"Chalky, when you go in there don't say there's any fucking going on or they'll sling you out or give you fourteen quid"*. He said *"fair enough"*. "Call the last one"... "Coming", "state you're name", *"Chalky White"*, "your age", *"thirteen"*, "In your own words, tell the court what you saw". *"Your honour, I was with me two brothers playing football and me see the white man and the white woman, they were fuuu. I'll tell you what I see man. I see ten toes up, ten toes down, a big white ass going round and round, a dick going in and a dick comin' out and if that ain't fucking you can sling me out"* [gives the V sign]. God bless Chalky, rest in peace. (2002b)

This joke begins with an attempt to goad a response, imaginary or not, from those who do not enjoy this type of humour - the lefties. Then, the discussion of his friend's change of accent signifies a preoccupation with cultural hybridity. The 'Chalky' joke that follows is considerably mild in comparison to the embodied racist humour of Chapter Three. The racist intelligence and civility stereotypes remain, and the intelligence stereotype is also reinforced in relation to Frank Bruno, but the main incongruity in this section is created by the use of various accents, as the misplaced

accent of the school friend in the first example is reinforced in the proceeding 'Chalky' joke. Overall, the use of accents and caricature simply sets out to demarcate groups, to create strangers, and inflict mild inferiorization.

There are also a number of culturally racist jokes that focus on stereotypical Indian accents. Bowen provides an example:

> I got lost [in Blackburn] and I found myself on this industrial estate looking for this place and I saw this Indian gentleman walking towards me. He had all the gear on, pyjamas and turban and everything, and I thought well he's local, you know. So I said, "excuse me", nice chap, said, "excuse me". *"What wanting"* [Indian accent], I said "Tesco". *"Bloody Tesco, what is bloody, bloody?"*. "Tesco?", *"Tesco, what is? Just thinking, oh Tesco, West Indies 114 for 5"*. (2003)

Bowen introduces the joke by way of a return to an old dwelling (specifically a *neighbourhood*). First, the alien clothing that comes into focus - which is simultaneously used as a signifier of the Indian man's belonging *and* non-belonging in the area - of his status as Bauman's neighbour and alien. This is the first incongruity. Specifically, the 'test score' punch line introduces the linguistic exchange that also negotiates belonging in the location, through the presentation of a misunderstanding that highlights the neighbour/alien dichotomy. Such a joke would likely form an expression of linguistic ambiguity as it is not severe enough to generate extreme racism - but it does provide mild inferiorization. Below is a mild example from Reid that shows how language misunderstandings between ethnic groups are brought into humour:

> I've gone in the Chinese and said give me a three, fourteen, eighteen and sixty-four pale, I said how much is that, Bob will give you the money. And he said *"what you do for a living?"* [Chinese accent]. Said "what", he said *"what you do for a living?"* Oh I said, "I'm a comic", and it's like everyone you tell you're a comic they say "tell us a gag". He done the same thing. He said, *"you tell me a joke"*. Then the frying pan went vurrum. I said "your pan's on fire pale". He said *"what"*. "Wok, wok", *"who there?"*. (1995)

While this example is fairly mild it does depict the Chinese man as the one who is failing to understand, as linguistically inferior.

In the next example, Davidson stereotypes the Indian accent. He asks, 'you been around Slough, there's bleeding millions of them, sounds like a motorboat factory, going but but but but' (1982). In this joke, a metaphorical description of the Indian in Slough making the noise that is produced by a motorboat engine uses the idea of the mechanised as humorous, which obviously inferiorizes through ridicule. While the

Bowen joke focused on misunderstanding, this joke concentrates on the absurdity of the alien sound. It also describes the number of aliens, perhaps 'swamping' the sounds of the non-others, a theme that regularly appears in cultural racism. A similar example appears in a Jones performance from the same year:

> Here, went out for an Indian, you ever been in one of those Indian restaurants? Mark, where did we go? India? Tonight, sat in this Indian restaurant, thought I had a fucking outboard motor stood beside me, but but but but but, and don't they have big crisps? Have you seen the size of them crisps? But by Christ don't their vindaloos make your ass sore the following morning? You sort of cough and bluubluubluu, it's gone in'it and you sort of walk about like that thinking where the fucking hell's the germiloid. (1982)

This joke uses the same absurdity but also introduces another well-rehearsed theme of culturally racist jokes directed at the Indian, that of the difference and effect of the cuisine of the 'other'. There are frequent references in this genre to the effect of various types of curry on non-others, in terms of it giving the diner diarrhoea (e.g. Davidson, 1980; Jethro, 1993). This, while acknowledging that 'we' may enjoy the food of the 'other', sees it as inferior in consequence.

Jokes also focus on religious practice and seek to demean and inferiorize. For example, in a recent stand-up show, Jethro said 'I saw this Muslim shagging a sheep in a field. They took him to court but the judge said he was well within his rights because it was his-lam' (2006). This joke presents the alien religion in a play-on-words that seeks to mock it, but might also express anxiety about dangerous 'others' who seem unable to be sanctioned under British law. This is a further theme of the working class racism mentioned throughout.

While the jokes in this section vary in the severity of racism expressed, because they all make reference to differences in cultural characteristics - to language, food, dress, religion - they all aid the rhetorical task of identity management and inferiorization that seeks to negotiate the 'other' as alien and neighbour. They also appeal to those who require this type of ideology.

Conclusion

The chapter began with a discussion of cultural racism as a racism of cultural difference, but one specifically connected with nationalism, xenophobia and immigrational prejudice, and which all connect to a specific resentment based working

class racism. I then outlined three rhetorical themes that appear in humorous co-agitators, which have the functional effect of supporting cultural racism. The first rhetorical theme develops from cultural racism being a form of coded racism that appears in response to the increasing unacceptability of embodied racism. This task negotiates the attitudes of acceptability and unacceptability. The second theme deals with a negotiation of national territory that fixates on the maintenance and fears the transgression of national boundaries. This anxiety is created from issues of space and exclusion in cultural racism, focusing on those 'others' that move to the 'wrong' side of the boundary. This is a proteophobic concern that enforces the exclusionary logic of racism. Thirdly, cultural racism encourages an ambivalence of social identity that negotiates the competing categories of the 'other' as an alien and a neighbour. This is generated by the presence of the 'other' in the immediate social location and employs stereotypes of cultural and linguistic difference. This theme focuses on rhetorically affecting the logic of inferiorization.

To reiterate, I have shown that both embodied and cultural racism follow the logics of exclusion and inferiorization, and in this respect they are similar. What differs primarily is a concentration in cultural racism on the exclusion on the non-racial immigrant and boundary transgressor, rather than the exclusion and disposal of the 'waste' product of embodied racism. In relation to inferiorization, cultural racism sees a focus on the cultural difference of the Asian 'other' in the multicultural context, rather than the cultural lack of the black 'other' in the colonial or post-slave context. Where cultural racism falls on black people in the British context, there is an increased overlap of embodied themes.

In the next chapter I move away from the analysis of racism created by white comedians towards an analysis of the use of the same sign-systems and stereotypes in what I describe as the 'reversed discourses' of black and Asian comedians.

Chapter Five

The 'Other' Laughs Back

Introduction

The focus of this chapter diverges somewhat from that of the previous two chapters, which analysed embodied and culturally racist humour, and outlines what I label the 'reverse discourses' of black and Asian comedy. These reversed discourses appear in comic acts that employ the sign-systems of embodied and cultural racism, but develop a reversed semantic effect. I argue the humour of these reversed discourses is significant in relation to racist truth claims and ambivalence management because it often forms a type of resistance that can, first, act rhetorically against racist meaning and so attack racist truth and points of ambivalence. Second, and connected to this, it can resolve the ambivalence of the reversed discourse itself. Alongside this, and paradoxically, reversed discourses also contain a polysemic element that can, at times, reproduce racism. The chapter seeks to develop a means of analyzing the relationship between racist and non-racist meaning.

Considering the amount of black and Asian comedy available that could be included under the category of reversed discourse, and the relative brevity of this chapter, I have opted only to highlight the particularly apposite instances from a broad spectrum that exists, with the aim of outlining a basic typology. This typology is constructed by showing some key methods or styles in which racial stereotypes are employed and attacked in reversed discourse, and by explaining the potential degrees of functional influence that particular reversed discourses might have on both the ambivalence of racism and the ambivalence of the reversed discourse.

The chapter begins with a definition of 'reversed discourse', before connecting the definition with the existing literature that theorises humour as an expression of resistance or as a counter discourse. Following this brief theoretical discussion, I divide reversed discourses into two broad types along the lines of racial categorisation. First, I outline the reversed discourses produced by black comedians, before giving a specific analysis of the use of 'nigga', a derivative of the racist epithet 'nigger', in the reversed discourse of embodied racism. The use of 'nigga' in reversed discourse is described and evaluated, in some instances, as an attempt to overcome semantic alienation, as the

altered semantic focus of the term and the placing of it in a humorous rhetorical structure can increase the chance of diverting the earlier meaning of the word. Second, the chapter maps the reversed discourses in British Asian comedy, by showing how this comedy also reverses stereotypes but also, significantly, resolves the ambivalence of a hybrid identity. It is noted that the most successful responses to embodied racism come from African-American comedians. Apposite examples of reversed cultural racism are drawn from British Asian comics. This maintains the logic of selection used in Chapters Three and Four.

Throughout the chapter I employ Bauman's concepts of proteophobia and proteophilia in order to analyse responses to some of the comedians mentioned, which highlights the ongoing struggle to fix the meaning of the 'other'. Reversed comic discourses often act as a form of resistance by attacking the ambivalences of racism, or work to resolve their own ambivalence, all in the effort of establishing, maintaining or changing definitions of race and ethnicity. In Chapters Three and Four we saw that proteophobic exclusion appears as a reaction to the 'other' in racist joking, and acts to combine with incongruous/rhetorical structures to produce more robust or 'layered' techniques for ambivalence removal. In a reversed discourse, with the 'other' of embodied and cultural racism creating humour that openly attacks this racism, the discourse may actively produce further ambivalence for the racist discourses. In some instances proteophobia and proteophilia are mobilised as a reaction to the comic 'other', which acts as a further attempt at fixing the ambivalence that these comedians, or the 'other', provokes. Hence, these reactions begin to appear outside of the comic frame.

Reversal and Resistance: An Effective Counterstrategy?

While reversed humour may develop many of its own sign-systems, it is principally a discourse or an element of a discourse whose etymology can be traced, often in a quite evident manner, to an earlier discourse that uses identical signs but which employs these signs with a reversed semantic effect. It is a discourse that is produced, situated and directed in clear opposition to the embodied and/or culturally racist meaning of the earlier discourse.

This reversed semantic focus or change of 'direction' is created by a change in the social dynamics of the speaker, and the audience or reader, which amounts to a change of *context*. Billig has described the relationship between comedic context and meaning:

'if joke-telling is a social phenomena then the meaning of a joke can be affected by the context of its telling' (2005: 31). While in previous chapters it was shown that both the structure and the content of humour are important for the generation of rhetorical/comic meaning, here context is brought to the forefront as the third area that affects meaning. This, therefore, is a chapter that discusses humour that is linguistically comparable to racist humour, but differs, primarily, because it is the 'other' of the earlier discourse that articulates it and is often, but not always, the preferred reader of the text. One consequence of this shift is that debates are often provoked over the denotative meaning of the text and the racist connotations that it may provoke. This is because, while in any linguistic utterance the preferred meaning of the speaker cannot be guaranteed, in a reversed discourse the antagonism between the earlier discourse and the reversed discourse often aggravates, encourages or increases its polysemic potential. As stated in Chapter Two, such interactions or discursive confrontations may not have a 'winner', and polysemic expression may form the outcome of the utterance, thus leading to the simultaneous existence of the earlier and reversed meaning from a single utterance.

The interaction between the generation of a reversed discourse and a racist meaning, or the problem of polysemic meaning, is confronted in some studies although most do not outline or evaluate the racist potential of the reversed discourse. For example, Berger (1998) suggests of this type of ethnic comedy that 'the situation is always perilous, for the comedians always face the risk of being thought of as ashamed of their racial or ethnic identity' (1998: 70). Berger's analysis does not develop a description of the potential effects of the humour, so while he may articulate one concern that the comedian may have, missing from his comment is a consideration of the way in which the comedian might support various racist meanings, or the earlier meanings to which the stereotypes are connected.

Malik (2002) provides an alternative approach to the analysis of reversed ethnic comedy. In comments on the British Asian comedy sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me* (which is examined later in the chapter), she, like Berger, both acknowledges and questions the use of race and ethnic stereotypes in humour. She asks, '"[w]hen is a stereotype not a stereotype?" Because these stereotypes are negotiated by Asians and deliberately subverted through visual puns, spectacle and parody, can we safely say that racist meanings are not gleaned from the text?' (2002: 103). Malik also articulates the same dilemma in relation to Black clown stereotypes:

> The central question has always been one of whether images of Blackness in television comedy 'play on' or 'play off' the long-established Black clown stereotype, and whether we are being invited to laugh *with* or *at* the Black comic entertainer. (ibid: 92. Original emphasis)

While Malik does explain this as a problem of polysemic discourse, of multi-faceted considerations, she does not undertake any mapping of meaning or begin to elicit the presence of racism in polysemic discourse. In the second extract, by focusing on what we are being invited to laugh at, Malik implicitly points towards the preferred meaning of the text as central for identifying a particular instance of racist meaning. I argue this should not be the focus of a consideration of meaning in a reversed discourse. Malik's articulation of a dichotomy between the direction of laughter as being one 'with' or 'at' the 'other' is initially problematic - because it does not consider the polysemic nature of these discourses - and can be reframed. So instead of this, I approach reversed comedy by arguing that while in a reversed discourse we may see the presentation of the reversed voice of the 'other' as the preferred meaning, there is always a prior reliance on the sign-systems of earlier racism. These earlier meanings have the potential to remerge, gain purchase and act rhetorically. Any evaluation of a reversed discourse should, therefore, be rephrased as a consideration of how the images of the 'other' in humour both simultaneously 'play on' and 'play off' the long-established stereotypes. I begin with an acceptance of the polysemic structure of the discourse and remove any overemphasis on the intentionality of the speaker, thus beginning from the position of the discourse as having a *simultaneous*, and paradoxical, racist and anti-racist potential, which is exaggerated by humorous rhetorical co-agitators. It is, therefore, antagonistically polysemic.

In elaborating on this, the multiple meanings generated by the reversed comic discourse represent forms of sign-slippage. In Chapter One, I outlined how sign-slippage is a necessary constituent for the rhetorical/incongruous structure of humour (e.g. Eco, 1986: 272; Dorfles in Attardo, 1994: 176). In a reversed comic discourse a further semantic layering is added to this basic structure. While racist sign-systems can be reversed in serious communication and this is a type of slippage that specifically forms serious appropriation, the additional placing of this initial reversal in a comic incongruity multiples the structural potential for generating semantic movement. The additional layering complicates the interaction between anti-racist meaning, racist meaning and rhetorical effect in this type of humour.

Humour as Resistance

The idea that humour and mockery can act as a form of resistance is a popular theme in humour studies. Early superiority theorists acknowledged it and sought to control the subversive potential of ridicule and mockery when it was directed at those in power by those who were not. A later and notable example of the theorisation of humour as resistance appears in Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the carnival culture of the Middle Ages. Gurevich summarises Bakhtin's argument as one that 'stressed that at the heart of carnival was the idea of overturning reality, the tradition of turning the established social and religious order upside down' (1997: 57). There are numerous contemporary studies that provide examples of humour acting as a form of resistance, on topics that range from political satire to joking in the workplace (e.g. Benton, 1988; Dundes & Hauschild, 1988; Linstead, 1988; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Stokker, 2001; Bryant, 2006). An illuminating example appears in Bryant (2006), who describes how humour was used as a form of resistance by Czech nationals under Nazi occupation (see Stokker, 2001 for a similar example in relation to Norway). Importantly, and although only implicitly highlighted by Bryant, a part of the function of this resistance humour was the resolution of an ambivalence, through the presentation of the resistance movement as unambiguously united. This example is worth looking at in more detail.

Bryant describes the joke as an ideal form of symbolic resistance because, '[o]vert, easily translated political statements could lead to trouble, but jokes were too nebulous, too slippery to get one arrested. Jokes, with their ironic tones and ambiguous messages, flew underneath the radar of the nazi authorities' (2006: 140). He also describes the existence of ambivalence in the social situation where resistance humour emerged, by outlining how in Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia, 'ambiguity and uncertainty... constituted the essence of everyday life for most protectorate inhabitants' (ibid: 136). He goes on: 'Rather than clearly staking out a Czech or anti-Reich position, Protectorate inhabitants were often befuddled by the greys' (ibid: 149). Existence in Nazi held Czechoslovakia was, therefore, not constituted by an unambivalent, unchanging resistance to Nazi occupation. Bryant theorises the function of resistance joke telling as a 'safety value', or 'a harmless vent that allowed Czechs to continue working in factories while maintaining a vague sense of patriotism and integrity' (ibid: 148). He explains that the '[j]okes were also a way of coping, staving off despair and attempting to come to terms with a world that lacked order and clarity' (ibid: 149). His comments suggest then, but do not specifically state, that a significant connection exists between these jokes acting as a safety valve and the ambivalence or lack of order in the

situation in which the jokes were told. We saw in Chapter Two that Bauman describes order-building as a major concern of modernity, and that I propose that joking is one way of resolving its semantic side-effect, which is the creation of ambivalence. In Nazi held Czechoslovakia, a connection existed between the emergence of the humour and the ambivalence of the social situation for the protectorate inhabitants, and the humour helped resolve this ambivalence. Evidence of this resolution is strengthened because Bryant argues that the jokes were often transmitted from Czech resistance fighters to the government in exile in London, where the presentation of a particular unambiguous image of resistance would have been preferable. Although Bryant does not make the specific connection, in terms of the use of a Koestlerian concept of co-agitation, between the emergence of the resistance jokes and the ambiguity and angst that he describes in the social situation, this ambiguity would, no doubt, have proved a hindrance for the presentational aims of the resistance movement.

The Reversed Discourse and Resistance of Black Comics

Not all performances by black comedians can be subsumed under the category of reversed discourse. Forms of comedy that are not included were judged to not give a 'voice' to the 'other', could be seen to lack 'authenticity', but perhaps most importantly, did not significantly alter the context of the text. Such texts do not develop a reversed semantic focus and are not situated in opposition to embodied or cultural racism. This section begins with an example of the historical scope of black performance that is included in the category of reversed comic performance. Reversed discourse constitutes a type of performance whose appearance cannot be simplistically ascribed to a particular social situation or historical period, rather, it is both as old as black performance and the race stereotypes that it works against. Because of this, discourses of reversal are not specific to post-colonial societies (c.f. Malik, 2002).

Sotiropoulos (2006: 3-4) illustrates early twentieth century black resistance discourse in the work of early minstrel comedians Bert Williams and Ernest Hogan. These performers 'celebrated black communities, denounced Jim Crow, and critiqued black elite pretension - all behind the minstrel mask' (ibid: 4). Paradoxically, their acts also perpetuated popular racist stereotypes of black people, which had to be an essential part of the content for them to be allowed to perform at all:

> ... white critics were particularly attentive to moments when black audiences in the balcony laughed but whites remained silent. These moments made all too clear that black performers had told jokes that went literally and figuratively over the heads of their white audiences. (Sotiropoulos, 2006: 6)

Minstrel comedians such as Williams and Hogan would have actively played-up to race stereotypes for the white members of the audience, while offering alternative meaning for the segregated black audience confined to the balcony above them. It is also likely that the section of the show aimed at the white audience would have contained some subtle mockery of the race stereotypes expressed. Importantly though, as long as the white audience kept on laughing at the presentation of basic stereotypes, the performance, which contained resistance, would also have created a monosemic racist laugh, although we should not underplay the extent to which the white audience may have appreciated the polysemic aspects of the performance as well.

Black Responses to Embodied Racism

In this first section, on black comedic responses to embodied racism, two examples of humour are used to highlight its impact as a form of reversal. The first is a reversal of the savagery/civilisation dichotomy that is constructed in embodied racism (as outlined in Chapters Two and Three). This reversal is epitomised by the hugely influential African-American comedian, the late Richard Pryor. The second is a reversal of race sex stereotypes that also connect with this dichotomy as a specific subsection. This example is highlighted in the comedy of Reginald D. Hunter, a US born comedian who performs stand-up in the UK. These examples are shown to have varying levels of success as a form of resistance and reversal, principally because of their complexity, scope and exposure.

In his lifetime, Pryor appeared in numerous stand-up concerts and films, and is perhaps the best known and most influential of black comedians. His work is noted for its critical comment on both US racial and cultural issues, with many citing him as one of the most influential black performers in the post-civil rights era. The recognition and controversy that Pryor provoked as a comedian relates not just to his ability to make audiences laugh, but is indicative of the content and the context of the material, which is connected to his resistance to racism and to the rhetoric of his comedy in attacking the ambivalences of that racism. This is exemplified in his diversion of one of the central dichotomies of embodied racism - civilisation/nature - which describes the

'other' as savage or corporeal in comparison to the civilised white European. Pryor enacts this diversion principally through a comic trope that matches Bergson's idea of the comic as '[s]omething mechanical encrusted on the living' (1911: 39).

Bergson argued that laughter would result if a human appears as a mechanised being: 'The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine' (ibid: 32). While ultimately incomplete as the universal theory of laughter that it was intended to be, and connected to his wider philosophical outlook that saw problems and dangers in a mechanised society, specifically as a break in 'duration', Bergson's idea is acknowledged as a useful explanation of one specific comic trope (Berger, 1995a: 41-4). Pryor's comedy uses this trope effectively by depicting white Americans, in accordance with the racist dichotomy, as civilised but also as repressed and mechanised. African-Americans are depicted as natural, expressive and able to enjoy the basic pleasures of existence. This reversal is used throughout his performances. Pryor (2004) describes the difference between whites and blacks eating dinner. White people are depicted as not making any noise when they eat - in a civilised, orderly manner but also in a robotic style - whereas blacks are depicted as eating loudly and expressing enjoyment. The metaphor is extended to portray the mechanical, unemotional voice of the white American, to Pryor's enjoyment of picking his nose and farting, and to comparisons of black and white woman menstruating (ibid). The reversal is also used to describe a white machinelike denial of pleasure, especially of sexual pleasure. Pryor explains that 'white folks don't cum, that's why they fuck quiet... niggas make noise when they cum' (ibid). His continued articulation and redirection of the civilisation/nature dichotomy creates the image of the white American existence as incomplete, thus situating his comedy in opposition to one of the central tenets of the embodied racism that is aimed at black people. Through this, Pryor provides a key site of reversal and resistance to the dichotomy and encourages its ambivalence through this disturbance. Thus offering a rhetorical redefinition of reality.

I now examine some responses to Pryor's comedy. We saw in Chapter Two that proteophilia is, for Bauman, a reaction to the ambivalence or multiform of the 'other' that displays adoration or deification towards the novelty of the 'other'. Importantly, the 'other' who exists for proteophilia is someone that performs rather than threatens or challenges, which makes celebrities apposite targets for this tendency. We saw that proteophilia often appears in relation to the construction of aesthetic space and is usually directed towards the 'other' from left-wing or liberal political and social

commentators. Although proteophilia might emerge as a well meaning response to the 'other', it always presents a simplification and an attempt to remove the ambivalence or anxiety of that 'other'.

Following the death of Pryor in December 2005, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown offered commentary in *The Independent* that, in paying tribute to Pryor and acknowledging his influence on African-American culture, acted to deify Pryor in the spirit of proteophilia. These comments begin with the description of her reaction on hearing of his death:

> I was ironing a pair of silk trousers - an early birthday present - when I heard of the death of John Lennon. I had just come home after celebrating my birthday in the West End with my family when I heard of the death of Richard Pryor. I felt the same blow in the gut. (2005)

These comments may seem innocuous enough, but they set the scene for a posthumous deification of Pryor which is an instance of proteophilia (and does not consider much of the content of Pryor's performances). Specifically, Alibhai-Brown uses Pryor's death to make a political comment against black US Republicans Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. This centres on what Alibhai-Brown argues is the mutual exclusivity of being black and Republican. On this she states, '[b]y now Pryor will, I imagine, have started up his own rant against Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. I would pay a thousand pounds for a ticket at the afterlife show' (ibid). While this comment appears quite ridiculous, and also, again, quite banal, and apart from the obvious problems associated with the assertion of an 'authentic' black political position that Powell and Rice are not supporting, the imagining of Pryor's comments from the grave are just that, an imagining, and are not aligned with his comic material. Pryor's comedy contains criticism of politicians, especially white politicians such as Richard Nixon, but throughout his career he rarely criticised African-Americans. In contrast, he did say at one point, '[b]e glad for any nigga doing anything' (Pryor, 2004b). Alibhai-Brown's posthumous imagining and strategic use of Pryor borders on misappropriation and deification of the 'other', which are key aspects of proteophilia. It is only through the ignoring (or erasure through proteophilia) of Pryor's material that he can be presented as an iconoclast.

A second example of resistance to embodied racism from a black comic appears in the comedy of Reginald D. Hunter. As a relatively unknown comedian, Hunter remains unsung in the British mainstream but has been courted by left-wing and liberal broadsheet critics for tackling challenging racial issues in his comedy. He began his

career as a stand-up comedian in Birmingham, after being sacked from a touring children's show (Cook, 2004b), and has taken three shows to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival - *I Said What I Said* (2002), *White Woman* (2003) and *A Mystery Wrapped in a Nigga* (2004) - all of which were nominated for the Perrier Award. This made him the first black comedian to receive nomination. In *White Woman,* Hunter concentrates on the subject of interracial sex and miscegenation, which I describe in Chapter Three as a recurring concern in embodied racism and a specific subsection of the civilisation/nature dichotomy. In one joke Hunter says,

> I remember the first time a English white woman asked me out, I reacted like a runaway slave. "Would you like to come out with me for a drink?" "Girl you better shut your mouth, shit woman you gonna get both us killed". (2005)

.

Drawing on racist ideas of the prohibition of miscegenation, specifically from the US context, and the impact of that on Hunter's identity, the joke attempts to transfer the material into a British context. This forms the incongruity as examples of comparison and stereotype - which are comic tropes (1995a: 54). The extent to which the joke reverses racism is questionable, as a racist reading could assert the idea of the black man out of context as an example of him lacking civility or adaptation.

At present Hunter's comedy, of which this is just an extract, does not develop the complexity or interconnectedness that appears in Pryor's work. While Hunter addresses racial stereotyping (Rampton, 2005) and violence against women, and has made critical comments that political correctness can only serve to cripple stand-up comedy (Gibbons, 2003a), his work, as yet, does not possess the strong themes of reversal shown by others. His comedy appears more obviously polysemic than that of Pryor's. So, for example, he has been known to begin a monologue by asking the audience, '[a]ny woman here ever been beaten up by a man?' (Logan, 2005). The use of such material always runs the risk of invoking racial stereotypes of savagery and sexual violence, and if it is to act as a form of reversal it needs to be situated in a specific relationship to racism, in which mockery rather than affirmation of the dichotomy becomes the most obvious meaning. Reversed meanings have a polysemic potential that can rearticulate the earlier racist meaning, and Hunter has been accused of this; *The Times* comedy critic Alex O'Connell has charged him with being 'flagrantly misogynistic and enforcing racial stereotypes of black people' (Gibbons, 2003a).

Black Responses to Cultural Racism

Some sociologists have described cultural racism as the dominant form of racism in contemporary British society (Modood, 1997, 2005b). It has also been suggested that cultural racism is directed at Asian ethnic groups, while black and Afro-Caribbean people are principally affected by embodied racism (ibid, 1997: 156-60). Nevertheless, black comedians do respond to cultural racism too. In line with the responses to embodied racism presented, these examples emphasise reversal, and work to attack some of the inherent ambivalences of cultural racism.

Richard Blackwood, Felix Dexter and Curtis Walker are three of the most successful black British comedians who are still not as widely recognised as many white mainstream or alternative comedians, and are not household names. Lenny Henry, by contrast, is probably the most popular of black British comedians, appealing to many white Britons as well as blacks.

Henry's early career saw him winning *New Faces* in 1975, appearing on *The Black and White Minstrel Show* and on the BBC sketch show *Three of a Kind,* with Tracy Ullman and David Copperfield. By 1984 he had his own *Lenny Henry Show,* and it ran for a decade. Following this, he returned to live stand-up before attempting more diverse projects. Issues of race, ethnicity and racism are most prominent in Henry's early material, but not all of this material, especially the later shows, offers a critical content (see Henry and Fuller, 1989, 1994; Fuller, 1983a, 1983b; Henry, 1999). For example, in *Three of a Kind* (1983), aired from 1981 to 1983, Henry performs two characters with an obvious ethnic content, 'P. C. Ganja' and 'Delbert Wilkins', the latter also appears in his later stand-up shows. Neither of these characters are particularly critical of racism and play on race stereotypes in a fairly monosemic fashion. In *Live and Unleashed* (1989), a feature length video from the late 1980s tour of the same name, Henry does present examples that reverse cultural racism, most of which highlight and subvert stereotypical depictions of dichotomies of language use, mannerisms and dispositions between ethnic groups (see also, Henry and Fuller, 1994 for similar examples). Here is one such joke:

> People react to blackness in different ways. I had a friend called Dave who was a white guy and he really wanted to be black. With his whole heart, Dave wanted to be black. All his friends were black, he had a black girlfriend, he knew all the words to the Bob Marley records, we're talking commitment here. We were so different, I'd go round to his house, knock, knock, "Dave, coming out for a game of football" [said with a Dudley accent]. *"Well Len, my woman*

> *just put in a pot of chicken and some rice. I feel like I just want to rest tonight. Easy Lenny"* [said with a stereotypical West Indian accent]. I'd say "alright dude". I had a lot of white friends. I don't mind, they could hangout with me. They'd be out stealing hubcaps otherwise, you know what they're like, give them a break I say. (Henry in Henry and Fuller, 1989)

Henry directly reverses stereotypes of black linguistic competence and criminality. The first part of the example shows a fairly straightforward and gentle mockery of cultural and racist stereotypes, by highlighting in the joke content that not all black people, or white people for that matter, speak in a prescribed fashion. In the second section of the joke a similar technique is used towards cultural stereotypes of black criminality (this is a recurring theme in Henry's comedy, e.g. Henry and Fuller, 1989, 1994; Fuller, 1983a, 1983b). This represents an explicit reversal of a dichotomy, rather than the deviation we saw in Pryor's work. Reversal is outlined by Berger as one rhetorical device that can structure humour (Berger, 1995a: 55). While Henry attempts to show the absurdity of such stereotypes through this technique, and attacks the content of cultural racism, the examples do not remove the polysemic potential in the discourse and the jokes could also support the earlier stereotype. In the first example a racist reading might mock white men who choose a 'lesser' racial group or culture with which to identify. In the second, the reversal might simply be taken as an absurdity, rather than seeing the absurdity in the original stereotype of black criminality. Thus the rhetorical potential is ambiguous.

Henry's comedy is not as deliberately brash or vulgar as a great deal of African-American comedy (e.g. Pryor, 1971, 1975, 1978, 1982, 1991; Murphy, 1983, 1987; Rock, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2005; Foxx, 2004 [1997]; Chappelle, 2004; Curry, 2004) and is generally aimed at a mainstream and family audience. It therefore only develops quite mild reversals of cultural racism and comments on ethno-cultural hybridity. My next example, from the stand-up comedy of the US comedian Chris Rock, attacks culturally racist attitudes to speech in a very different way.

While discovered by Eddie Murphy, Rock came to prominence as a stand-up comedian with a tour-de-force performance in his first HBO special *Bring the Pain* (1996). Before that he had received only limited recognition as a comedian (e.g. *Saturday Night Live* from 1990-3) and bit parts as an actor (e.g. *Beverly Hills Cop II,* 1987). He has since gone on to receive an increased level of exposure in two more HBO specials (Rock, 2004, 2005), in appearances in several Hollywood films (e.g. *Dogma,* 2001; *The Longest Yard,* 2005), and in the British context, with his stand-up being broadcast on British terrestrial television. Rock's comedy deals uncompromisingly with

American race and ethnic relations, and racism, providing many examples of reversed discourse (Rock, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2005). What follows is an example of Rock resisting and attacking white racist attitudes to black vernacular and linguistic competence, through mimicking and mocking comments directed at Colin Powell:

> Colin Powell can't be president... whenever Colin Powell's on the news white people always give him the same compliments, always the same compliments, "How do you feel about Colin Powell?" "He speaks so well", "he's so well spoken", "he speaks so well", "I mean, he really speaks well", "he speaks so well". Like that's a compliment! Speaks so well's not a compliment okay, speaks so well's some shit you say about retarded people that can talk. What do you mean he speaks so well?... He's a fucking educated man, how the fuck do you expect him to sound? You dirty motherfuckers, what're you talking about? "Speaks so well", what you talking about, "he speaks so well". What voice were you looking to come out of his mouth? What the fuck did you expect him to sound like? "I'm gonna drop me a bomb ta-day, I be pres-o-dent", get the fuck out of here. (Rock, 1996)

Rock performs all of his comedy and film roles with a characteristic and caricatured shriek that gives his voice an added impression of contempt that is not transferred in the text. In discussing white attitudes to Colin Powell, Rock uses repetition and exaggeration or hyperbole, which are included in Berger's list of comic rhetorical devices (1995a: 55), to unpack culturally racist views of black speech. Through the comparison of the white 'compliment' and typical comments about the 'retarded', Rock is able to construct a very effective incongruity. This incongruity is strengthened by the context Rock develops, and it is because of his outright mockery of white racist attitudes that the chance of reasserting the racist stereotype - or the chance of polysemic meaning - is reduced. A racist reading would need to distance itself completely from Rock's preferred meaning, perhaps by concentrating on the final line of the quote, that impersonates the stereotypical depiction of Powell. The extent that Rock, and Pryor, use techniques to stretch the incongruity, so that the stereotypes are pushed away from the racist habitus in which they emerge, creates far more effective reversal and resistance humour, which is perhaps why they are recognised as two of the most significant black US stand-up comedians vis-à-vis their specific stance on racism. This is something that is not achieved in the British comedy of Hunter and Henry, but is also something that is framed in the specific context of black resistance to US race relations in the post-civil rights era.

The Use of 'Nigga' in Reversed Discourses

In Chapter Three I presented a rhetorical analysis of the word 'nigger' in embodied racism, its etymology was mapped, and it was described as one of, if not the most offensive of racist epithets. The word was described as a 'master signifier' and as a means of denoting a history of oppression and violence. In addition, I argued that its denotive capacity is relatively fixed, thus denying connotation. However, as with most words, its context of utterance still does have an impact on the meaning that is generated by the term (for a similar discussion see Billig, 2005a: 31). For example, attempts to appropriate the word from its racist context and disempower its racist meaning may be successful but can also rearticulate the racist meaning. Such attempts usually involve the use of the word 'nigga' rather than 'nigger', which, it would seem, helps create a paradigmatic separation from the term 'nigger' and set up the potential for this new line of connotation to emerge. The word 'nigga' is used in many forms of media, in film dialogue and hip hop lyrics, and has been described equally as a positive and pernicious expression. The word and debates on its use also appear in, and around, various instances of humour.

I examine its potential as a form of resistance to the meaning of 'nigger' and any racist meanings that are rearticulated by the use of the term. This, therefore, is a discussion of the term's polysemicity, or whether or not the attempt at expropriation is successful. As stated, the term is used extensively in African-American stand-up comedy (e.g. Pryor, 1971, 1975, 1978, 1982, 1991; Murphy, 1983, 1987; Rock, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2005; Foxx, 2004 [1997]; Chappelle, 2004; Curry, 2004), so I will take two well known examples from Pryor and Rock and outline the differences in use. Specifically, Rock's use of the word in *Bring the Pain* (1996) where it is used to describe a certain type of black person, and Pryor's early use of the word and later change of attitude towards it.

As stated, Rock uses the word to distinguish between types of black people:

> Now we've got a lot of things, a lot of racism going on in the world, who's more racist? Black people or white people? Black people, you know why? Because we hate black people too. Everything white people don't like about black people, black people really don't like about black people. There's some shit going on with black people, there's like a civil war going on with black people and there's two sides, there's black people and there's niggas, and niggas have got to go. Every time black people want to have a good time, ignorant ass niggas fuck it up. You can't do shit, you can't do shit without some ignorant assed nigga fucking it up, can't do nothing, can't keep a disco open more than three weeks, "grand opening",

> "grand closing". Can't go to a movie the first week it comes out, why? Because niggas are shooting at the screen, what kind of ignorant shit is that? "It's a good movie, it's so good I gotta bust a cap in here". Hey I love black people but I hate niggas, oh I hate niggas, boy I wish they'd let me join the Ku Klux Klan, shit, I'd do a drive-by from here to Brooklyn. (1996)

For embodied racism, 'nigger' is used to depict the black man as subhuman, as representing the 'other' that exists at the negative pole of all racist dichotomies. It is, therefore, always used in discourse that constructs the 'nigger' in relation to something that is more human, more civilised, to something that has a greater social worth. Rock, in this example, is using the term 'nigga' (although the pronunciation does not allow for a clear distinction), to construct a difference between normal or respectable, and anti-social or ignorant, black people. This represents the key paradigmatic construction in this text, which is voiced as the dichotomy between 'black people' and 'niggas'. Importantly, the construct created is a dichotomy between the moral and the immoral, Rock is describing an element of the black community that is involved in crime and anti-social behaviour, that lets the rest down. While Rock is creating a distinction between his use of 'nigga' and a racist use of 'nigger', because the latter would, in all likelihood, not want to make a conscious separation of African-Americans into two groups, there are key connections between his use of the term and the racist meaning of 'nigger'. We have seen that racism, while asserting universal dichotomies, will use techniques that excuse the ambivalence of these dichotomies. Often these techniques excuse or particularise some of the 'others' as not 'other', as acceptable and 'not like the rest'. Rock's example divides African-American's into 'black people' and 'niggas', and while Rock may say rightly so (see below) this has the effect of producing a rhetorical/comic expression of an important racist ambivalence, which is the negotiation of acceptable and unacceptable 'others' in the context of an overarching racism. Later in the performance Rock pre-empts criticism of the joke:

> And I see some black people looking at me, "man, why you gotta say that? Why you gotta say that? It ain't us it's the media, it ain't us it's the media, the media has distorted our image to make us look bad, why must you come down on us like that brother? It ain't us it's the media". Please cut the fucking shit okay, okay, okay, when I go to the money machine alright, I ain't looking over my back for the media, I'm looking for niggas. (1996)

This addition to the joke attempts to construct a further realism for the statement, all of which takes place, paradoxically, in a comic situation that allows for meanings to be judged without truth criteria.

In an interview between Rock and Nelson George, Rock gives some explanation of the joke, which received a great deal of media attention. A part of the explanation of the joke relies on its perceived truth value:

> C. R.: I didn't think about it in political terms, I never think about the stuff in political terms. I think about it, it's funny, is it funny... A lot of times I'd do press and um, you know, especially white journalists, and I guess some black journalists too, "how does a black audience feel about the niggas and black part", and I'm like "watch the special", it's a whole black audience. Thank god I'm not, thank god I came up in this era of video and DVD and everything so it's there, there's no misinterpretation of it. Where, you know, Lenny Bruce, if I'd done the same routine in the 50s. I probably couldn't have walked through Harlem because it would be all misconstrued. You know what I mean? It would have been taken all out of context.
> N. G.: Why do you think that white people like it so much? That's always the big bone of contention, "Well they like it so much", so it can't be, there must be something wrong.
> C. R.: I don't know everyone's got *it*, you know everyone's got there own version *of it* in their, you know, Italians have their version of it, Jewish people have their own version of it. I definitely know gay people who go "I'm gay, but I hate faggots". I've heard *that*, you know what I mean, everyone's got their version of it.
> N. G.:Did you feel that it did pigeonhole you? Or people attempt to pigeonhole you through that particular bit?
> C. R.: Hey it's good for me, it really helped my career like nothing else, but people politicised it more than it maybe should have been, you know it's just jokes man.
> (Rock and Nelson, 1996)

This is interesting for a number of reasons. In Rock's comments we can see the simultaneous assertion that the statement that 'black people' and 'niggas' exist has a truthful value to it *and* that it is not a political statement because 'it's just jokes man' - that it is not serious - all in a comic incongruity that can generate rhetorical meaning around the 'truthful' reading of the discourse. I now give a quite different example from Richard Pryor's comedy.

It has been suggested that Pryor was one of the first black performers to attempt appropriation or reclamation of 'nigga' and 'nigger' (Cook, 2004a). In his earlier comedy he uses the term frequently and indeterminately. In an interview he once said of this, 'one day I said "Hello, I'm Richard Pryor, I'm a nigger". I wanted to take the sting out of it. Nigger. Nigger. Nigger. It was the truth and it made me feel free to say it' (Pryor in Sullivan, 2005). Pryor's approach adheres to the general philosophy that the meaning of terminology can be wrestled with and redefined, but does not consider the rearticulation of earlier racist meaning. Despite this statement, Pryor famously changed his mind on the use of 'nigga' following a trip to Africa:

> One thing I got out of it was magic I'd like to share with you. I was leaving and I was sitting in the hotel and a voice said to me, said "look around, what do you see?" And I said "I see all colours of people doing everything", and the voice said

> "Do you see any niggas?" And I said "no", and said "you know why? Cos there ain't any", and it hit me like a shot man. I started crying and shit. I was sitting there and I said "I've been here three weeks and I haven't even said it, I haven't even thought it", and it made me say "oh my god, I've been wrong, I've been wrong, I've got to regroup my shit. I ain't never gonna call another black man a nigga". You know cos we never was no niggas, that's a word that's used to describe our own wretchedness, and we perpetuate it now, cos it's dead, that word is dead. (1982)

Although the extract may be an exaggeration designed for performance affect, from this point on Pryor's use of the word diminished (although he did use it occasionally). Interestingly, Pryor's description of the word as 'dead' matches the comments on denotive signification from Barthes (see Chapter Three), that it is the truly traumatic signs that become fixed and deny connotation. Although the meaning of 'nigga' has variation from context to context, it would seem that while not denying connotation absolutely, because 'nigger' is so denotive of racism, the connotations of 'nigga' are often monosemic and can easily revert to the earlier meaning. It therefore remains problematic when placed in rhetorical humorous structures, something that Pryor realised when his own context of thought shifted during his visit to Africa. Therefore, it is the denotive specificity of 'nigger' that prevents the use of 'nigga' being a reliable element of resistance or reversed discourse.

The Reversed Discourse and Resistance of British Asian Comics

British Asian comedians are as underrepresented in the British media as black comedians, but in addition to this, the US does not provide a supply of Asian comedy as notably as it does African-American. There are Asian comedians in the UK who have developed cult recognition, most of which use race and ethnicity as a dominant theme in their comedy, and develop reversed discourse. Two lesser known examples include Paul Chowdry, a second-generation British Asian who was described as using 'conventional racist humour - the kind Bernard Manning still spews out - to invert prejudice rather than reinforce it' (Hari, 2005), and Patrick Monahan, who is from Newcastle and of Irish Iranian heritage (Hall, 2005a). Neither of these comedians have received mainstream recognition.

The comedy sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me* (Bhashar et al, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003), starring Sanjeev Bhashar, Meera Syal, Nina Wadia and Kulvinder Ghir, which ran for three series on BBC television from 1998 to 2001, offers many examples of reversal relevant to this section. Malik explains how the show contains,

> satirical sketches on the "institutional Whiteness" of broadcasting boardrooms, on "Going for an English" meal in a restaurant, and on anthropological travelogues of "exotic India" ... the series is also based on traditional and updated stereotypes of British-Asians (the spiritual guru who exploits mysticism-loving Westerners, the Bollywood macho man, the restrictive parents, the Indian 'wide-boy', the inexhaustible bhangra dancers, the more-English-than-the English Asian social climbers' (2002: 103).

Originally to be entitled *Peter Sellers is Dead* (Thompson, 2004: 334) (which is, ironically, a much more effective resistance/reversal title but less funny), the show's final name seems indicative of the polysemia that it does not escape from. Some sketches are very successful in their attempts at reversal. For example, the 'going for an English' sketches, which show a group of young Indians finishing a drunken evening with an English meal, highlight one site of both continued racist abuse and proteophilia, which seems obviously illuminated and problematised when reversed. There are, however, other sketches that do not seem to work so well:

> Caroline Aherne - acerbic as ever - describes the show as being 'like Bernard Manning, but without the timing'. This seems a little harsh, but there are certainly times when the *Goodness Gracious Me* team fall back a little too readily on old-fashioned notions of ethnic difference... (ibid: 336)

Examples included in this sentiment are those that seek to criticise British Asian culture - the depictions of parents, 'Ali G' styled youths, single and sexist Asian men and Bollywood actors - all of which can be seen to reassert traditional stereotypes.

Returning to Asian stand-up comedy, two of the more well known comedians are Omid Djalili and Shazia Mirza. Both have received critical attention from particular sections of the media. I outline, first, their attempts to reverse stereotypes and form resistance in humour, principally by charting their expression of race and ethnic stereotypes of Asians. The second section examines ambivalence resolution by the comedians. Here, issues of ambivalence and identity are examined. In each case potential racist meanings are elicited.

Resistance to Cultural Racism

Djalili is a British comedian of Iranian heritage and a member of the Baha'i faith. He has performed stand-up comedy since 1995 and appeared in a number of films, including *The Mummy* (1999), *Gladiator* (2000) and *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004). Ethnicity frequently forms a significant section of the content of his

ostentatious and lively comedy act, although his use of it has changed over time, as the titles of his shows signify. Early shows included *Kebab Shop Owner's Son* (1995), *The Arab and the Jew* (1996), and *Omid Djalili is Ethnic* (1997), which are contrastable with his latest show, *No Agenda* (2006a, 2006b), and signify an expressed desire to move into the mainstream (Hall, 2005a, 2005b).

Djalili's stance on stereotypes is explained by Pickering. Djalili will 'play with stereotypes in order to make people realise they *are* stereotypes, then ... subvert the stereotype' (Pickering in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 109. Original emphasis). Djalili adds 'I know it's about subverting those stereotypes. The whole point of subverting stereotypes is to create instead some sense of the whole character' (Djalili in ibid: 110). For example:

> One is the joke about "you think we're all so sexist in the Middle East and that's rubbish. People always accuse me and even when I go shopping with my wife, people always say why does your wife walk 20 paces behind you? That's not sexist, she's weighted down with the shopping.' You turn that around. (Djalili in ibid)

By placing this material in the incongruous structure of the joke, Djalili may well momentarily divert the major premise - the literal impression of sexism in the Middle East - but this does not divert the stereotype. The minor premise clearly relies on a simple rearticulation of that sexism. There is a very clear reading that would gain pleasure from the comic sexism and racism, and so no real subversion is created. Djalili, in part, acknowledges the problem he faces:

> You play with the stereotype and what you do is try and dispel the stereotype, but then sometimes you realise you've just confirmed it. That's when I've gone through and analysed it afterwards, but I think that's the kind of structure to it, playing with the stereotype and then undermining it. (Djalili in ibid: 110)

While it is clear that Djalili has no liking for racism, and hopes to resist it through humour and improve cultural understanding, some of the material could too easily be read in the original format. If the progressions through Djalili's understanding are not made, or are resisted, there is a racist laugh available in much of the comedy. So, for example, when he says of Arabs and Jews that they are "two sides of the same coin: hooked-nosed, penny-pinching liars" (Djalili, 2006a, 2006b; also Hall, 2005b), the racist meaning of the utterance is not difficult to locate. Likewise, when Djalili (2006a, 2006b) asks a section of the audience to impersonate Indians as outboard motors - producing 'but-but-but' noises - we are back in the territory of Jones' and Davidson's

1980s material, with an exact replication of the inferiorizing linguistic humour. Djalili thus presents an undeveloped form of resistance humour.

In outlining responses to his comedy, Djalili gives comments that suggest proteophobia and proteophilia are encouraged in the policies and attitudes of broadcasters. On an appearance on the *Jack Dee Show,* he explains how the political content of the act was cut from the final broadcast:

> I don't think it was direct censorship, but this was around the time of the Ken Bigley kidnap. It was a very sensitive time and the BBC was understandably nervous. Every day, they kept moving the broadcast date of my show back, 'can we take this joke out? That joke?' I don't particularly think I'm an offensive act at all. But they cut out the routines I thought would make the most cultural and political impact (Djalili in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 103).

This leaching of the political and cultural content of Djalili's act shows the policing of the 'other' in proteophobia that necessarily pre-empts the creation of the safe 'other' that proteophilia demands. Parts of the performance are policed in the creation of an inoffensive, playful and unthreatening 'other' that the proteophile can enjoy consuming in her aesthetic region, without being politically or intellectually challenged by the performance outside of the aesthetic space. This leaves the BBC's audience to view Djalili, as he describes in his own words, as the 'funny belly-dancing Iranian comedian, rather than a heavy political comic' (ibid: 103). The 'other' in this instance remains well-policed.

A second incidence of proteophilia surrounds the content of the *Bloody Foreigners* documentary that Djalili presented for Channel Four. Proteophilia is generated through both the presentation of a certain image of Djalili and the style in which the topic is discussed. Djalili discusses this documentary, on asylum seekers, in a *Guardian* article, explaining how he became sceptical about the motives of Channel Four in having a comedian present a documentary on this serious topic:

> Djalili's mixed feelings highlight an increasing dilemma for broadcasters determined to play the ratings game at every opportunity: they want to look as though they have a social conscience, and they need to fulfil their multicultural and non-British programme remits. (Morrow, 2001)

Djalili's reservation is expressed through the statement: 'My whole problem was with the notion: "It's about asylum-seekers, now let's make it fun"' (ibid). Following the success of the documentary, Djalili was asked to appear in similar programmes.

Channel Four saw the potential in this sanitised and humorous view of the 'other' in the documentary setting:

> Channel 4 was impressed enough to offer him six more films: "They keep on saying things like 'It would be good if you could go to Cuba and interview Fidel Castro', and I'm like: 'And say what?' They don't have a clue," he laughs. "They want me to be a cross between Louis Theroux and an ethnic Mark Thomas". (Djalili in ibid)

In wishing to create programming that is both popular and adheres to the non-British programme remits, images are created that can provoke proteophilia. The presentation of what Bauman describes as the vagabonds, 'the dark moons reflecting the shine of bright suns; the mutants of postmodern evolution, the unfit rejects of the brave new species' (1997: 92), has a great entertainment value. A comic, consumer and viewer friendly setting allows the 'other' to be neatly processed and consumed, representing a key process for resolving the ambivalence and anxiety of the 'other' as proteophilia.

Shazia Mirza, a British Muslim of Pakistani heritage, has received little television coverage and thus far released no videos or DVDs. Nethertheless, she does have a significant cult following and has become more widely recognised for some of her post-9/11 material, which has received significant review coverage in the broadsheets. She is one of few female British Muslim comedians, and in developing a reversed discourse, Mirza is acknowledged for using her comedy to challenge two issues: 'the prejudices of non-Muslims and the particular conservative views held by Muslims on woman and their position and role in society' (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 100).

First, Mirza offers a series of jokes on issues relating to the threat of terrorism and the rise of Islamophobia since 9/11 that examine non-Muslim perceptions of Muslims. These jokes are worth considering as a group. On introducing herself she often says, 'My name is Shazia Mirza. At least, that's what it says on my pilot's licence' (Gibbons, 2003b; Mirza in Hari, 2005; Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 101). She has also remarked, in building on the well known joke from *The Fast Show*, '[d]oes my bomb look big in this?' (Mirza in Hari, 2005). On a radio show she suggested that GCSE results for Muslim boys had improved because, '[o]bviously the boys are doing well at chemistry, because they've got to make the bombs' (Hall, 2005a). On a tour of Denmark she appeared on the news programme *Deadline*, and gave some advice on the Iraq war effort, '[t]hey asked me where I thought Saddam was hiding his weapons of mass destruction. As if I'd know. I said up his wife's burkha, because no one would think of looking there' (Bedell, 2003). Finally, she explains of a personal predicament,

'I'm terrified I'll die a virgin. Not because I'm obsessed with sex. I'm not, I don't want to get to Paradise and have to sleep with one of the suicide bombers' (Mirza in Hari, 2005).

While these jokes are all entertaining and play with the prejudices, stereotypes and anti-Muslim racism that has proliferated post-9/11, they do not match the reversal achieved by Pryor and Rock in the US context. This may not, or need not, be the 'aim' of the comedian, as humour is an aesthetic enterprise rather than a political one, and it is important to acknowledge the progressiveness of Mirza's emergence, and the cultural importance of a Muslim woman being a successful stand-up comedian. Despite this, the material tends to remain rather weak as reversed discourse and readings generated may not differ from the cultural racism outlined in Chapter Four, where the 'other' is inferiorized in order to reduce anxiety. This certainly is not Mirza's intended meaning.

Mirza's material on Muslim and non-Muslim sexism presents examples that are closer to the exaggeration and mockery exhibited by Pryor and Rock. These jokes are more vulgar in many respects than the jokes above, and are uncompromising in their attack on sexism. For example, she says: '[m]y mother would constantly say "Don't go out after 4pm - you will get raped". Do all rapists come out at 4.01pm? Do they say, "Oy, Ahmed, let's get her before *Countdown*?"' (Mirza in Hari, 2005: 4). On strict attitudes of Muslim women's dress she adds, '"If men are the ones with no self-control, why do we have to be covered head to toe?" she demands. "Surely it's them who should be covered up - or better yet, chained"' (ibid). Finally, on female chastity she comments on 'a Turkish friend who has been told constantly she must have her hymen intact on her wedding night, so she only has anal sex on dates. "I'll be a virgin on my honeymoon," she says. Yeah, a virgin with haemorrhoids.' (ibid). These jokes do not lend themselves so well to polysemicity and so form robust counter-sexist rhetoric.

The following reaction to Mirza's humour is a little different than what might be anticipated on the proteophobia/philia spectrum. The stranger or 'other' in Bauman's writing does not always have to be one that is constructed by race or ethnic difference, but can be created by any configuration of socio-structural difference. It is quite possible that other individual or socio-structural characteristics can become the focus of proteophobia if attempts are made to control any ambivalence or anxiety that the 'other' might provoke. Mirza has described a reaction directed towards her from, among others, some Muslim men. Lockyer and Pickering (2005b) summarise the opposition she has faced:

> She has been criticised by those both within and outside her faith. She has received vicious hate mail and death threats, and whilst performing, has been physically and verbally attacked by Muslim men who believe Muslim women should not appear on stage. (ibid: 100)

The proteophobic urge, in its most extreme form, often manifests as the urge to annihilate. In this case, the threat of death and physical attack are directed at Mirza because her otherness has entered an unusual social space, the comic stage. Undoubtedly, hate mail and death threats represent an extreme and unjustifiable reaction to Mirza's comedy, but in offering some analysis of this as a reading, it represents a reaction from a very rigid and uncompromising view of the female Muslim 'other'. In such reactions the ambivalence, or the inability to conceptualise a Muslim women performing stand-up comedy of this kind, with humorous comments on ethnicity and religion, leads towards the expression of the proteophobic reaction and the attempted exile of the misplaced 'other'. She represents a challenge to specific categories of social space. In defending her humour, Mirza reflects this by suggesting that these reactions are of a certain type:

> often they do have a problem themselves, and their problem is more to do with me than it is to do with my material, it's that they don't like me as a woman getting on stage being a comedian, regardless of what I say. Sometimes there are Muslim men who say, 'I don't think it's appropriate you doing comedy, to get on stage and do what you're doing, we don't find that appropriate'. Muslim women aren't meant to do that. (Mirza in ibid: 121)

In this example of proteophobia, the transgression of the gendered 'other', which discusses a particular culture or cultural knowledge in front of those who are both inside and outside of the cultural group, generates a transgression of categories that leads to the proteophobic reaction from those with fixed ideas of gendered social spacing.

Ambivalence and Ethno-Cultural Hybridity

This section outlines ambivalence resolution in British Asian comedy, specifically the ambivalence of ethno-cultural hybrid identity. This is achieved through an examination of ambivalences expressed by Djalili and Mirza, which are generated from the interactions between the effect of social influences on their identity and ethnicity. Thus, the humour will have a wider functional effect *for* ethnic identity.

Djalili shows the importance of anxiety for his humour: 'I'm far more interested, right now, in comedy set up more in terms of what I'm thinking about, something internally directed towards outside events... internal stuff is more about your angst' (Djalili in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 114). Djalili's identity provides the motives that drive the negotiation of ambivalence through the presentation of concerns surrounding ethno-cultural hybridity. This co-agitates dilemmatic aspects of his identity, but also an awareness of the ignorance that dominant groups might have towards hybridity. For example, Djalili often begins his stand-up routine by talking with a mock Arabic accent. He then, after a few minutes, talks with a Kensington accent. This forms the first expression of a series of juxtapositions that run throughout the performance, which Djalili uses to express his sense of being between cultures. This is expressed by the Jekyll and Hyde impression that runs throughout some of his shows, which he uses as a metaphor for highlighting what he calls cultural 'blind spots' (Djalili, 2006a, 2006b), or the cognitive misunderstandings that we are all capable of.

This expression of hybridity takes place comfortably in humorous incongruity, which allow for the co-agitation of disparate elements, without either a contradiction of the rules of humorous expression, or without moving outside of the potential of this linguistic structure. In continuing this theme, Djalili uses a joke at the beginning of the performance to explain his habitus position as one that is both anti-racist and culturally 'other': 'I'm a part of a comedy cultural exchange, tonight I'm in Bristol and Jim Davidson is being buggered in Baghdad' (ibid; see also Djalili in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 104). By presenting Davidson as his perceived comic antithesis, Djalili highlights his political and cultural position as being a reversal of bigoted attitudes:

> If you can get that across in your first minute, then people can trust you... 'it's Jim Davidson being buggered senseless in the Middle East which also means 'I don't like what he stands for (i.e. racism, bigotry) neither do you... the subliminal message here is that I am affirming the principle of unity and diversity. (Djalili in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 105).

This represents one position in Djalili's comedy - and directly aids resistance to cultural racism - but there are other aspects to Djalili's comic identity, that do not give the impression of cultural 'unity and diversity'.

This opposition manifests itself in two ways. First, he juxtaposes his Kensington upbringing with a yobbish and violent Chelsea-supporting persona that appears when Djalili is either watching football, is irritated, or becomes too hot (Djalili, 2006a,

2006b). Added to this Chelsea-supporting persona are the frequent Godzilla impressions that appear throughout the show, which also represent a change of personality on becoming overheated. These examples act as an alter ego to the politically and culturally astute Djalili (Djalili, 2006a, 2006b; Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 102), and reinforce the idea that Djalili believes that everyone is capable of having cultural blind spots. An example shows Djalili expressing his own reversion to cultural stereotypes, where he bemoans prejudice towards Asians following 9/11 before describing his own paranoia at seeing Arabs in airports. In the joke he asks an airport security guard about their presence, saying 'I'm as alarmed as anyone here by the sight of Arabs at airports. "What about the Pakistani blokes in the uniform? What's that all about?" "Those are the pilots sir"' (Djalili, 2006a, 2006b; see Hall, 2005c for a slightly different version). The joke presents a stark contradiction to the image of him as embracing unity and diversity, and shows him experiencing the dilemmatic - white prejudice and minority discrimination - all of which are expressed and resolved in the rhetorical device.

Djalili's work, like much reversed comic discourse, contains polysemic meanings, some of which are racist, but his aim is to express the various imprecisions that the self, perhaps as a node in discourse, may have in understanding the nuances of hybridity. He says '[l]ife isn't clear cut, there are grey areas, and I think we should listen to those grey areas because that's where the truth lies' (Hall, 2005a).

An ambivalence in the humour of Mirza principally focuses on issues of cultural prohibition and transgression. Hence her material expresses 'cross-cultural anxiety' (Benedictus, 2005). Mirza states the importance of sharing her own experiences in her comedy (Mirza in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 117), but has also faced pressure from her family and community because she became a stand-up comedian, and has stated that she did not tell her parents about it for two years. The co-agitated ambivalence is, for Mirza, principally constructed by the incongruity of the stereotype of what a Muslim woman should do and that of a stand-up comedian. This has been described as the 'pressure to be all things to all people - the devout, dutiful daughter and the cross-cultural iconoclast... "Our culture doesn't encourage women to speak, never mind do stand-up"' (Mirza and Gibbons in Gibbons, 2003b). Again, this ambivalence resolution simultaneously reverses cultural prejudice. This manifests as the presentation of temptation in jokes:

> I talk about my travels and my experiences of being in those countries and it's also about temptation, how I'm tempted to do things, like I don't smoke and I don't drink and I don't take drugs and I don't gamble and then I go to all these places, in all these different countries all over the world and every time I go somewhere I'm always tempted to do something. (Mirza in Lockyer and Pickering, 2005b: 116)

This represents a straightforward transference of temptation into her comedy, and of course comedy allows such material to be presented without consideration of its seriousness. Mirza can present an anxiety from her temptations at the available vices of society and the incongruity of this with her cultural beliefs, and achieve some rhetorical and cathartic resolution. On gambling she says, 'I was so scared that if I did something once then I'd be an addict' (ibid). This is extended to other areas of life, so for example, she says 'I wonder what it might be like to have a drink. I've never had bacon in my life' (Mirza in Giddons, 2003).

This temptation is then co-agitated with an evaluation of identity in relation to cultural practice, which creates the two elements of the humorous incongruity. This emerges as she gives examples, not of weakness or temptation, but of actual conscious evaluation of her faith. Bednall explains this: 'She does draw a distinction between the 'cultural things I don't believe in, like arranged marriages', and her faith. But, as she also accepts, faith is a personal matter, and the distinctions she makes are subtle and individual' (Bedell, 2003). Mirza's presentation of both temptation and evaluation represent the resolution of cultural practice and identity in her comedy as a form of ambivalence. It is likely that the success of this material is related to its collective purchase with her audience.[39]

Conclusion

The chapter began by defining a reversed discourse, by giving historical context and connecting the idea with studies that examine humour as a means of resisting dominant power relations. In line with this, I outlined how black comedians reproduce stereotypes from embodied and cultural racism in order to produce resistance meaning. After this, I outlined some of the ambivalences that are negotiated in Asian comedy, through an

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[39] In more recent material, Mirza, like Djalili, has begun to move away from ethnic joking. On this she says 'I have to tell the truth about being Shazia Mirza, not some Asian woman from Birmingham' (Mirza in Akbar, 2006: 27). Akbar adds that, '[t]he material for her current show, *Fun*, focuses on shoplifting from budget fashion stores and waxing body hair rather than the trials and tribulations of being a British Muslim' (ibid). This movement does not detract from the rhetorical reading of her earlier material.

examination of stereotypes and ambivalence. The discussion of proteophobia and proteophilia towards the end of various sections examines how definitions of the 'other', in both racist and reversed humour, is a dynamic process that despite determined attempts, lacks the fixity that racism, proteophobia and proteophilia desire.

The overriding observation from the chapter though, is an understanding of the polysemicity of this humour, and from this, a consideration that reversal in humour is never automatically 'successful'. In fact, reversal humour throws into doubt the very notion of 'success' in humour. As humour increases its structural polysemia through the material of reversal, ambiguity increases, fixed meaning becomes even less likely to appear and the potential for multifarious political and ethical interpretations map themselves onto the socio-linguistic space. In the next chapter I will examine 'postmodern humour', which multiples the lack of fixity in humour and removes the authentic impression of the 'other', while simultaneously creating humorous images of that 'other'.

Chapter Six

Postmodern Humour: The Case of Ali G and Borat

Introduction

Chapter Five observed how reversed discourses, created and articulated by the 'other', act as a form of resistance to humorous and non-humorous embodied and cultural racism. The chapter also explained how this reversed humour contains a significant polysemia, because while the comedy acts as an intentional diversion of racist semantics it occurs through the re-employment of identical or similar sign-systems that have the potential to re-convey the 'original' racism. In building on this identification of polysemia, this chapter presents a further complication in race and ethnic humour and illustrates 'postmodern humour' and the 'liquid racism' that can appear in it.

The polysemic element present in all humour, and which increases in reserved discourses, is multiplied in postmodern humour at the expense of a dissipation, or alongside a disguise of, authorial intention. The chapter highlights postmodern humour and liquid racism in Sacha Baron Cohen's characters Ali G and Borat, as well as a number of other television and cinematic comic acts. Liquid racism is presented as a complicated, ambiguous and diluted form of postmodern racism.

The chapter begins with a description of postmodern humour as a distinct type that exhibits Bauman's characteristics of postmodernity. This definition is distinguished from the clichéd assumption of the postmodern mood as ironic - of a conflation between comic irony and societal ambiguity. Second, I give a definition of liquid racism as the polysemic and elusive racism of postmodernity, including postmodern humour, one that requires reflexivity in the viewer, and one that often involves real people in its performance. After this, an introduction of the central protean protagonist - Ali G - explains why he is ambiguous and how his misidentification aids his ambiguity. The discussion of liquid racism follows this. Ali G is described as expressing three strands of liquid racism. These are labelled 'postmodern minstrelsy', 'ethno-cultural hybrid racism' and 'anti-Asian racism'. It is the combination of the three, and the erasure they inflict on each other, that renders these forms liquid. The chapter also charts the appearance around Ali G of both of Bauman's tropes for ambivalence removal, proteophobia and proteophilia. The penultimate section outlines some non-racist themes

in Baron Cohen's comedy that add to the polysemia and encourage analytic confusion. Finally, Baron Cohen's character Borat Sagdiyev is then examined as a second postmodern character, particularly influenced by Jewish humour.

Postmodern Humour

For Bauman, postmodernity and liquid modernity are social formations whose central characteristic is the notable multiplication in the appearance and experience of ambivalence.[40] Primarily created by the disembedding effects of globalisation, Bauman describes ambivalence as nebulous in these social formations, as appearing in the political sphere, the economic, in relationships with others and in concepts of personal identity. I propose that postmodern humour is the humorous product of postmodernity and reflects its construction as a form of humour with a noticeable multiplication of ambiguity. This ambiguity exists as a surplus to that needed to construct humorous incongruity.

Before any more detail is given on this definition, I explain what I do not mean by postmodern humour - specifically the distinction between my definition of postmodern humour and popular notion of the postmodern zeitgeist as broadly ironic. While postmodern humour is a particular type of humour *in* postmodernity, irony is a trope that has been identified in a multiplicity of social and historical contexts.

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[40] The difference between Bauman's definitions of 'postmodernity' and 'liquid modernity' are slight. The term 'liquid modernity' replaces 'postmodernity' in Bauman's work, first, because of the potential confusion in popular and numerous uses of 'postmodernity', and second, because of the metaphorical potential he exploits from the term 'liquid', which is used to describe social formations that have less fixity than traditional modern social formations. For example, Bauman describes how:

> We are now passing from the 'solid' to the 'fluid' phase of modernity; and 'fluids' are so called because they cannot keep their shape for long, and unless they are poured into a tight container they keep changing shape under the influence of even the slightest of forces... Frames, when (if) they are available, should not be expected to last for long. They will not be able to withstand all that leaking, seeping, trickling, spilling - sooner rather than later they will drench, soften, contort and decompose. (2004b: 51)

See Bauman (2000, 2003, 2005) for numerous examples of the metaphorical potential exploited from the term 'liquid modernity'. As stated in Chapter Two, I see no real difference between the concept described by the terms and use 'postmodernity' as the dominant label.

In congruence with what I do not mean by postmodern humour, Pye describes how it is popular to view the comic or the ironic as 'particularly appropriate to the crisis of representation which characterises the postmodern mood' (2006: 53), that there is a 'current tendency to confuse self-conscious, self-reflexive modes of expression with irony and the comic' (ibid: 64). This view of the postmodern conflates the comic or ironic with postmodern ambivalence, ambiguity or uncertainty, and produces a reduced, inflexible and overly positive or celebratory notion of postmodernity, and an equally ill-defined and exaggerated depiction of postmodern humour. Put simply, irony is not the same as ambivalence.

Expressing this problematic conception, Flieger suggests the postmodern represents, 'an active embrace of the uncertainties of discourse' (Flieger, 1991: 21 in ibid: 62), and that, 'the comic subject is both pervasive and elusive, ubiquitous and absent, everywhere and nowhere in the postmodern maze' (Flieger, 1991: 7 in ibid). Alternatively, we can, through Bauman, see that to view the denizens of postmodernity as 'ambivalent subjects' rather than 'comic subjects', that is, subjects confronted with ambivalence, provides a far wider description of the range of postmodern situations and experiences - both 'good' and 'bad' - that social actors experience. Flieger's explanation of interactions with postmodern elements as an 'embrace' is a flawed analysis, and while I do not embrace Bauman's obvious pessimism, postmodern humour will not receive prior wholesale celebration or conflation.

Inaccuracy arises in some accounts because ambiguity, ambivalence, incongruity and paradox construct humour *and* characterise postmodernity, but this does not mean that all postmodern formations are funny or that all incongruities are postmodern. Chapter One explained that not all incongruities are humorous, and so an appreciation of the wider paradoxes of discourse and knowledge in a postmodern setting cannot coherently be taken to equal an extension of the comic. Pye encapsulates this sentiment, adding that the comic in postmodernity has been 'misused as a cover-all substitute for broad notions of ambiguity and incongruity' (ibid: 63). Bauman clearly does not do this, and the lexicon of postmodern ambivalence is firmly established and repeated in his work, but I would like to remove any confusion for the reader in my use of the term 'postmodern humour', which specifically is not the image of irony or comic irony as the zeitgeist of postmodernity. Postmodern humour is, therefore, a particular type of ambivalent humour, rather than irony per se, which is a much older literary trope.

As a manifestation of the postmodern, the constitution of postmodern humour will not wholly fit into particular or traditional humorous genres. Principally, it is humour that has multiple characteristics and gives multiple readings. Likewise, these readings will provoke ambiguity because the semantics of one may inflict erasure on others, and indeed, the trenchant acceptance of a particular reading may involve erasure as a necessary constituent. It will be funny for more than one reason and not funny for more than one reason. It will be understood on many levels and not understood on many levels. It is humour that is postmodern in the sense that Bauman describes the postmodern as an expression of unfinishability - it is humour whose readings and critical interpretations remain unfinished and unfinishable. The increased level of ambiguity in postmodern humour will also impact on its potential for rhetorical effect. The functionality of the humour will be increasingly confused and unpredictable, and may be said to be 'strained' so that no one rhetorical interpretation is allowed time to develop. Social actors will find the fleeting appearance of fixed meaning more difficult to draw on as a content for a rhetorical device. In terms of its relation to irony, one element of postmodern humour may be an ironic reading, but this need not be a constituent of it. It may, therefore, contain more than one particular trope or structure. This exemplifies the ambivalence of postmodern humour.

Liquid Racism

Postmodern humour will produce numerous particular meanings as an assemblage and in some instances any or all of these meanings can be racist. This layered racism, or racism inside layers, is called 'liquid racism'. In Chapter Two, I explained a preference for the term 'liquid racism' rather than 'post-racism' because the former does not literally suggest that we have moved to a state of society beyond racism, as post-racism would. Liquid racism confronts us as a different form of racism with which to deal, one that is fluid, one that is difficult to collect or to identify because it may escape or dissolve before it can be contained, and one that is explicitly encouraged and given coverage in particular forms of media. This is a racism that requires reflexivity in the reader as questions are asked on its meaning, social impact or implications for the self.

Bauman, while imprecise on the issue, describes the dominant racism in postmodernity and liquid modernity as one that resembles cultural racism (1997a, 1997b). Cultural racism represents a definition of racism via its semantic content. Liquid racism is an additional and specifically *structural* form and one whose

characteristics match those of postmodernity. Despite its elusiveness, liquid racism can appear as a structural form that is a reproduction of either embodied or culturally racist sign-systems. Chapter Four saw how cultural racism, in comparison to older racisms, becomes more complex and increasingly able to deny its racism - its content becomes manipulatively polysemic. This is not identical to the structured polysemia of liquid racism, which might see its own intentionality erased rather than disguised. Liquid racism also has the potential for a curtailed duration and can appear alongside quite contradictory or divergent meanings that encourage this curtailment, as racism is seen, then disguised, by the other available meanings.

Racist semantics usually stay in one place and are critiqued on the basis of staying in that one place and not becoming non-racist semantics. Liquid racism in humour dilutes any fixity of interpretation and so leaves the task of critique, and that of the reflexive reader, more difficult. In analysing this problem, we can accept that while racism may be difficult to locate from outside of particular readings, it can still be experienced in one or more of the particular meanings or readings. It is, therefore, a hidden or furtive racism. Critiquing it involves recording the assemblage, highlighting its connection to pre-existing embodied and cultural racism *and* highlighting any non-racist meanings that may work to conceal or remove liquid racism, implicitly or explicitly, accidentally or deliberately. It also involves critiquing the media forms that encourage it. It should be emphasised that while the humour has many meanings, any racist meanings still have the potential for racist effects, but these are more confused.

Chapter Two explained that postmodern humour will create a saturation of slippages and meanings, and prevents a dominant or solid connection of rhetorical effect and serious racist discourse, or makes the linkage seem less solid from particular angles. Hence the rhetorical effects created by a relatively stable expression of comic meaning are unlikely to be reproduced. While an increased level of ambiguity would present more opportunities for a divergence of literal meaning and so might suggest an increase in potential rhetorical generation, this generation is propelled in numerous directions and so does not develop the same level of collective or naturalised ideological presence. It represents, in essence, a mixing of metaphors. This contrasts sharply with the embodied and culturally racist humour presented in Chapters Three and Four, where the recurring similarity of meaning and relative lack of semantic movement outside of the particular rhetorical incongruity of humour can produce rhetorical effects and reinscribe truth perceptions. Because of this difference, any racist discourse will only appear momentarily in postmodern humour - forming liquid racism - and overall these

processes, while showing an increase in ambiguity, will curtail the potential for postmodern humour to act rhetorically to remove ambivalence and anxiety from racism. It is, therefore, *less* effective as a form of functional humour.

The Ambiguity of Ali G

Ali G is a comic character created and performed by Sacha Baron Cohen, a British Jew and graduate of Cambridge University. Having originally appeared on *The 11 O'Clock Show*, a Channel 4 comedy first aired in 1998, Baron Cohen's Ali G has since hosted a number of his own series and starred in a feature film entitled *Ali G Indahouse, The Movie*. In 2003, Baron Cohen exported Ali G to the United States for two HBO seasons of *Da Ali G Show.* Both have been broadcast in the UK by Channel 4 as *Ali G in da USA*[iii] and like his other material, are available on DVD and video. Most recently, one of these began on Channel 4 in September 2006. For those unfamiliar with the character, Ali G can best be described as constructed through the incongruity of a young working class, possibly white or Asian, inhabitant of Staines in Berkshire pretending to be a stereotypical, poorly educated, sexist, homophobic, possibly black, male inhabitant of a US ghetto, with interests in gang warfare, drug culture and gangsta rap.

The ethnic or racial identity of Ali G is ambiguous. Ali G frequently implies that he is black or a 'brother' - one of his most famed catchphrases is, 'is it 'cos I is black?'. An early utterance of the phrase came at an environmental protest, during a conversation between Ali G and a police officer.

> Ali G: 'Is it possible for us to get in?' [to the site of the protest]
> Police officer: 'Not at this stage, because it's still dangerous.'
> AG: 'Is it 'cos I is black?'
> PO: 'No not at all.'
> (Baron Cohen, 1999)

Despite his claims of being black, which are often believed or not challenged, the character is played by Baron Cohen who is a white male. As Howells explains: 'Baron Cohen is white; he does not 'black up' (that is to say darken his face with stage make-up) to play the character' (2006: 159).

Following the rise of Ali G, media commentary and debate sprang up to discuss the character's ethnicity and ethnic ambiguity, with some describing him as funny, satirical and positive, while others saw him as offensive and racist. This exemplifies the media interest that liquid racism encourages. In essence, this reversed the pattern presented by earlier race humour, where dichotomous racist language is given rhetorical support in jokes. In the case of Ali G, a racially ambiguous character is discussed in serious discourse, a realm with different rules, and defined and dichotomised in a response to its liquidity. The comic then responds with further protean representations.

In terms of authorial intention, Baron Cohen rarely discusses his comedy. When he has, the comments have been meagre and uncomplicated. In a rare example, originally printed in the *New York Times,* and reproduced in the *Guardian*, he defines the appeal of the character:

> Virginia Heffernan: Why is Ali G so funny?
> Sacha Baron Cohen: It's a pretty simple joke, which is why even some kids get it. Essentially you have two people who look totally different - one guy dressed in an absurd yellow jumpsuit, and the other guys dressed in a suit. They're speaking in different ways, with different body language and totally different levels of intelligence. (Heffernan, 2004)

This rare authorial explanation highlights how Ali G is, in part, created from the juxtaposition of differences in dress, mannerisms, speech and intelligence, yet nothing is said about the relationship between Ali G's race or ethnicity and the laughter he provokes. By 2004 much debate had taken place and it is inconceivable that Baron Cohen was unaware of the media debates that surrounded Ali G, so this statement probably represents a deliberate simplification, at a late point in the debate, as a further attempt to subvert or confuse. In line with a post-structuralist stance on authorial intention, it would not just be naïve to privilege this statement over others, it would specifically ignore the semantic assemblage generated by Ali G, which these comments fail to account for.

Non-authorial interpretations of Ali G's racial or ethnic identity form a tripartite typology, with media debate focusing on which is most correct (e.g. Gibson, 2000; Younge, 2000). These explanations suggest that Sacha Baron Cohen, in performing Ali G, is a white Jewish man who is;

- pretending to be black
- pretending to be another white man pretending to be black

- pretending to be an Asian pretending to be black

The three interpretations provoke a semantic correlation with three forms of liquid racism. These are discussed later as respectively:

- postmodern minstrelsy
- ethno-cultural hybrid racism
- anti-Asian racism

Although Ali G's racial ambivalence exists from the beginning, it is also possible to identify three presentational stages or styles in the material that encourage further ambiguity. These are:

- the hoax interviewer
- the celebrity interviewer or 'celeactor'
- the film subject

When different interpretations or hints at fixed racial identity are presented in each of these, further layering takes place.

In the original 'hoax interviewer' stage, Ali G interviews public figures, politicians, various officials and members of the public under the guise of being a television presenter of youth educational programmes. In this stage most of the jokes centre on differences in language use between the habitus of the 'street' and the 'establishment'. At this point Ali G is anonymous and participants treat him 'seriously', and when he makes claims of being black they appear to be accepted without question (Baron Cohen, 1999). *Ali G in da USAiii* (Baron Cohen, 2003) reconstructs the original format through exporting his hoax interview act to the US at a time when Ali G was unknown across the Atlantic, although Ali G's visits to the US began much earlier as his UK celebrity status increased (e.g. Ali G visiting the FBI, NASA and the NRA in *Ali G Aiii* [Baron Cohen, 2000]).

From the second series onwards, entitled *Ali G, Aiii* (ibid) in its video or DVD format, his unknown aspect had dissipated in the UK and Baron Cohen could only occasionally rely on the persona of the hoax youth television presenter in interviews with more naïve or detached social actors. Due to his popularity (which was in part

fuelled by his ambiguity), Ali G had become a celebrity, and a celebrity interviewer. Rojek describes Ali G as a 'celeactor': 'celeactors are adjuncts of the mass-media. They cater to the public appetite for a character type that sums up the times' (2001: 23). If the zeitgeist of postmodernity is one of increased ambivalence, then Ali G can be seen as a celeactor for it. As Bauman states, '[i]n our liquid modern times, when the free-floating, unencumbered individual is the popular hero, 'being fixed' - being 'identified' inflexibly and without retreat - gets an increasingly bad press' (2004b: 29). In this second stage, participants realise that he is not a 'real' person and participate for comic value rather than with serious intent. Ali G's Comic Relief interview of David and Victoria Beckham represents an example (Baron Cohen, 2001b). At this point, ambiguous claims of ethnic membership are not treated seriously and become a central part of the joke for the participants as well as the audience.

Finally, Ali G becomes the subject of a film in *Ali G Indahouse, The Movie* (Baron Cohen, 2002). While the film appears to offer resolution of Ali G's racial ambiguity, it can be read to play with this ambiguity. For example, the film frequently distinguishes between Ali G remembering the past and imagining the future, dreaming or fantasising. All memories of the past depict Ali G as a white male with a now abandoned dress sense closer to that of a heavy metal than hip hop fan. All fantasies depict Ali G as a black male. While this might support the notion of Ali G as a 'wigger', as a white man pretending to be black, the film is occasionally interrupted, through the use of a split screen, by the 'real' Ali G, which serves to additionally layer or 'fictionalise' the film. The interjection of Ali G is a firm reflection of the 'sly' Ali who is popularly applauded by some (Gilroy, 2002, 2004), and is the version of Ali G most closely associated with displaying 'convincing' ethnic ambiguity.

Coupled with the various racial meanings in the performance, these stages create a complex matrix of meanings for Ali G, which is perhaps unrivalled by any other comic performance. Exemplary of postmodern humour, Baron Cohen's Ali G produces multiple meanings simultaneously, none of which, we will see, can be privileged unproblematically in terms of situational logic, textual stability or the preferential intention of the author.

Seeing Ali G as 'Real'

Coupled with the ambiguities Ali G encourages, the character also undergoes a process of misidentification - of seeing Ali G as a real person - that, paradoxically, through giving the impression of a fixed identity, serves to increase the occurrence of situationally specific readings and thus overall ambiguity.

Unlike most comedians Baron Cohen rarely gives interviews. By providing no answers to the 'problem' of Ali G, he encourages media debate over the meaning of the character, fuelling speculation on the intended or preferred meaning. This silence has two connected effects: first, it constructs Baron Cohen as a personality who presents a semantic void, and second, it leads to the misidentification of Ali G as a real person or the celebrity that Baron Cohen does not become. For example, it is Ali G, not Baron Cohen, who attends the premier of *Ali G Indahouse, The Movie* (Baron Cohen, 2002), and is photographed meeting the protesters who argue the character depicts racism (see Kelso, 2002).

Baron Cohen's encouragement of this process of authorial void and character misidentification is highlighted in the following depiction of the rehearsals for the 2002 *Brit Awards,* where only Ali G is seen:

> Only one performer rehearsed in full kit: Ali G, in a gold Lurex jump suit. He has no day wear. He's either full on or he simply doesn't exist. Sacha Baron Cohen, the Jewish Cambridge graduate who performs him, will not let himself and his creation appear anywhere together. While Ali G speaks, Baron Cohen stays silent, never giving interviews... The separation is total. (Rayner, 2002)

The misidentification of Ali G is expressed in responses to the character, responses that also discuss his racial identity. Howells records one from a black comedian:

> Roger D ... admitted that he found the comedy effective while stating: "Ali G is a white Jewish guy taking on this black persona". Roger D's statement, however, is both less precise and more revealing than it originally appears. D says that 'Ali is a white Jewish guy...' What he does not say is *'Sacha Baron Cohen* is a white Jewish guy...' (Roger D in Slater, 2000, quoted in Howells, 2006: 166. Original emphasis)

This misidentification is repeated by Linda Lee-Potter in the *Daily Mail* (Lee-Potter, 2002), which is discussed later as a proteophobic response. Howells does not add specific discussion on the effect of this misidentification, but does invoke a metaphor to describe the style of impersonation Baron Cohen uses in the Ali G act: '[a] more fitting metaphor... might be of the music-hall ventriloquist whose doll speaks and behaves

perversely to the feigned embarrassment of the performer and the delight of the audience' (2006: 164). This metaphor can be extended with the addition of the idea of Baron Cohen as a semantic void. It is precisely the image of the doll mimicking the man that Ali G becomes, talking without its master, as he is misplaced as real.

The misidentification of Ali G serves to increase the ambiguity of the character. This is achieved because, and in a paradoxical fashion, the view of Ali G as a real person allows individuals to attribute real socio-structural characteristics to Ali G. This allows us to ask: '*What is Ali G?*'. We forget that Ali G exists in a realm without the rules of serious identity formation. The question remains plausible because Ali G is seen as a fixed entity - a personality - rather than a comic incongruity which could, following the logic of the absurd, be *racially protean*. While the content of the comedy is ostensibly constructed from various racial markers, many accounts do not describe Ali G as essentially protean, seeing 'him' as fundamentally person-like. This serves to multiply the overall ambiguity of the character because it allows for the entrenchment of more than one 'plausible' explanation to develop, each of which is tied to a fixed reading of a misidentified persona. This process is no doubt encouraged because Ali G interacts with real people in an everyday context.

Three Liquid Racist Readings

This section outlines the three central readings of Ali G that form liquid racism and became the focus of media debate. These are, those that see Baron Cohen, in performing Ali G, as a white Jewish man pretending to be black - which creates a form of liquid racism labelled 'postmodern minstrelsy'; those that see Baron Cohen as a white Jewish man who is pretending to be another white man pretending to be black - which is labelled 'ethno-cultural hybrid racism'; and those that see Baron Cohen as a white Jewish man who is pretending to be an Asian pretending to be black - which connects with 'anti-Asian racism'. Before that though, I briefly introduce relevant academic responses to Ali G.

In addition and in response to media and public reactions, there has also been an amount of academic focus on Ali G, which both celebrates the character and situates it in relation to racism. However, most academic identifications of racist meaning remain tentative, and are often caught up in the liquid aspects of the debate.

Gilroy (2002, 2004) presents perhaps the most celebratory commentary on Ali G, arguing that he, 'for a year or two recently managed to encapsulate all the larger political moral debates over the character and direction of contemporary British social life' (2004: 78). Gilroy gives a rather pious reading of Ali G, which will be discussed in detail later as an expression of proteophilia. Rojek (2001) paints Ali G in a still positive but less celebratory light, arguing that:

> Some sections of the media have criticised Cohen for perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes. Yet a careful reading of Ali G reveals that the comedy operates to deflate cant and humbug, whether articulated by racists and sexists or by those elected to serve as our moral guardians. (2001: 24)

The satirical purpose in Ali G is clearer in the earlier comedy that Rojek is writing about, but it is difficult to see how much of the later material, when Ali G is most like Rojek's 'celeactor', achieves any satirical impact.

While Nobil Ahmad (2002) describes Ali G's creator as a 'rich racist jew' (2002: 82), most academic discussions of racism in Ali G are more sophisticated and less racist than this. Malik (2002) explains how black comedians' criticisms of Ali G 'touch on broader issues around how Black comedians still feel their performance repertoires and points of access are restricted' (2002: 104). Lockyer and Pickering (2005c) also provide a critical assessment of Ali G, arguing that:

> The impersonation is neither susceptible to being used in a two-way manner, nor amenable to being used by blacks themselves... Since it is not it tends to block subversion of the stereotype from within, and encourage its reinforcement from without. (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005c: 196)

In an account most comparable to my own, Howells (2006) asks how it is that Baron Cohen can get away with his act and why outrage is not provoked in times as sensitive to race as ours. Arguing that Ali G is polysemic, Howells dissects the comedy to 'help explain why Baron Cohen's act is greeted with amusement rather than odium' (2006: 164), arguing that first impressions would suggest that, '[s]urely on such combustible matters of race, stereotyping and prejudice, people should be queuing up to take offence at this privileged, middle-class white comedian and his apparent mockery of black 'street' culture' (ibid: 160). In downplaying the existence of criticism, suggesting that 'there was some criticism, but the alleged outrage was, in reality, hard to find' (ibid), Howells sees the polysemia as crucial for explaining why Ali G is generally well received. For Howells, the polysemic elements are, first, that Ali G is an impersonation, which distances Baron Cohen from the character (ibid: 164), second, an

example of the humour of transgression - that 'the audience actually *wants* Ali G to transgress the boundaries of acceptable behaviour' (ibid: 165), and third, that Baron Cohen has remained out of the media spotlight (ibid). Howells goes on to identify the three central readings of Ali G's racial identity before concluding that '[m]y optimism lies... in the public reaction to him... the discussion in all sections of the media has been essentially intelligent, sophisticated and constructive... [and that] [w]e needn't always be embarrassed to talk about race in the future' (ibid: 171).

I diverge from Howells on a number of points. Howells concentrates on the effect of the polysemia as significant for the Ali G act not being denounced as racist. Rather than Howells' three point explanation for why Ali G is not denounced, it is the combination of racist readings, each erasing the others, that make critics tentative. Moreover, elements of the comic audience may be specifically attracted to this liquid racism and enjoy laughing at the 'other' without racist guilt (consciously or unconsciously), which because of its construction, would soon drain away (or be removed by serious discussion). In essence, I do not share Howells' acceptance of the benevolence of all of the Ali G audience towards otherness. While there are a number of similarities between the polysemia of Ali G outlined by Howells and my own, I emphasise how the polysemia seeks to present race meaning that is liquid, slippery and thus harder to pin down - but paradoxically easier to debate. So while Howells looks positively at the Ali G debate as an emerging discussion of race, I distil the racist readings, emphasising how a variety of racist laughs can be extracted from Ali G, but which erase each other when combined, and see the debate as a dichotomous media construction that disallows more sophisticated interpretations.

Postmodern Minstrelsy

The first liquid racism in Ali G is labelled 'postmodern minstrelsy'. Traditional blackface minstrelsy is a genre well known for its display of a wide range of race and racist stereotypes, and had an infamous success in mainstream media. The idea of Ali G as a minstrel act occurs because he conforms to a stereotypical black street culture, specifically through dress and use of accessories, mannerisms, speech and behaviour. The behaviour mimics a stereotype of young black males, both British and American, whose cultural background are said to emerge from a combination of Rastafarian influences and US or global hip hop consumer culture. Importantly though, Ali G does not black-up and this is the key element of ambiguity in this reading that allows for

other readings to erase it. This missing element makes the reading a form of liquid racism - it is incomplete.

In defining minstrelsy, Pickering outlines the collection of stereotypes articulated in it:

> Blackface impersonation was built around a repertoire of racially inspired stereotypes, many of which confirmed the general conception of 'negritude' as close to nature, deficient in the faculty of reason, naturally prone to indolence, indissolubly tied to bodily pleasures and incapable either of engagement with the higher arts or of participation in any significant social achievement. (1994: 313)

The minstrelsy of Al Jolson in his films *Mammy* (1930) and *Big Boy* (1930), the latter being an adaptation of Jolson's stage play of the same name, are well known examples of a genre that displayed race stereotypes of embodied, cultural and linguistic characteristics. British Minstrelsy dates back to the 1830s and was a staple of BBC light entertainment in the form of the radio show *The Kentucky Minstrels* from 1933 to 1950, and as the television programme *The Black and White Minstrel Show* from 1957 to 1973 (Pickering, 1994: 311).

Aside from Ali G, there are other representations of minstrelsy in comedy that appear postmodern. Reeves and Mortimer (1993) present a series of sketches in which they provide the faces and voices for blacked-up puppets of Otis Redding and Marvin Gaye, sitting on the dock of the bay. The sketches have received criticism, with Thompson arguing that,

> [a]n Anglo-supremacist strand persists in what you might call the neo-colonial school of British comedy - i.e. those who are influenced by Milligan above all others - from Reeves and Mortimer being unable to understand why anyone should be offended by them blacking up as Marvin Gaye and Smokey Robinson [*sic*] to Harry Hill's mystifying insistence that there is something intrinsically funny about the name of Channel 4 newsreader Zeinab Badawi. (Thompson, 2004: 326)[41]

Despite Thompson's comment, the absurdism of the sketches comes nowhere near reflecting any of the behavioural race stereotypes of minstrelsy. All that connects the sketches to minstrelsy is the use of blackface, which is also removed in the second series (perhaps as a respectful response to criticism), and the characters are distanced further by the use of high-pitched Yorkshire accents. Reeves and Mortimer's absurdism severs any connection with racism as the ambiguous combination of elements leaves the

[41] Thompson comments that Reeves and Mortimer imitate Marvin Gaye and Smokey Robinson. The characters in the sketch are in fact Marvin Gaye and Otis Redding. Reeves plays Otis Redding and Mortimer plays Marvin Gaye (Reeves and Mortimer, 1993: 36).

reflexive reader at a distance from traditional racist meaning. The surreal black comedy *The League of Gentlemen* also use a blackface character - Papa Lazarou - who as a Romany traveller, has the profession of door-to-door peg salesman that he uses as a front for 'wife collecting'. This involves kidnapping women (League of Gentlemen, 2001, 2002). The character is more problematic and essentially aggressive, yet its postmodern and satirical dimensions remain, and like most of the characters in *The League of Gentlemen*, intentionality and exact readings are hard to pinpoint.

These characters show the diversity, and lack of connection, between postmodern minstrels. Returning to Ali G, while the painted blackface acted as a central, unifying signifier in minstrelsy, and Baron Cohen does not 'black-up', most of the stereotypes mentioned above do appear. To reiterate, the lack of blackface in Ali G serves to encourage its liquid dimension.

A number of minstrel stereotypes directly appear in Ali G. For example, the indolence of Ali G is wonderfully expressed when he asks Tony Benn, 'Netha mind the right to work, what about the right to be lazy?' (Baron Cohen, 1999). 'Clowning' is one irreverent characteristic that appears in minstrelsy (Pickering, 1994: 313), and in Ali G. Pickering adds that minstrelsy displayed the blackface characters through 'physical aggression, a propensity to be light-fingered, an entrenched aversion to work and an incorrigible fondness for drinking, smoking and shooting dice' (ibid: 317). All of these stereotypes appear in Ali G and descriptions of him (with the exception of shooting dice).

Malapropisms are also used both by minstrels and Ali G. In *The Kentucky Minstrels,* in a typical minstrel conversation, '[b]oth 'Cuth' and 'Puss' regularly misused items of half-digested vocabulary. For example, in the show transmitted on 14th October 1942, Cuthbert exclaimed: "honest Puss, your ignoricity amazes me" thus manifesting his own 'ignoricity' in the process' (ibid: 318). Ali G has many malapropisms of his own. He asks the President of the FBI Agents Association: 'what is integeration?', a boy in a wheelchair is told: 'this is serious, you is a real disablist?' and when boasting he says: 'that's nothing, I have done it with Kate Moss' [putting his finger to his earpiece] 'what?... Illegibly' (Baron Cohen, 2000). His book *The Gospel According to Ali G* has a vocabulary littered with spelling errors, phonetic spellings and colloquialisms related to 'street' culture (Baron Cohen, 2001a). Such examples suggest that Lockyer and Pickering are correct to argue that, 'we have inevitably to ask if or to what extent Ali G represents a latter-day version of the practice of blacking-up' (2005c: 195).

This complaint was also debated in the media. During 2000, at the height of Ali G's ethnic ambiguity, *The Guardian* held an 'Ali G debate' which presented opinions from black comedians first published in *New Nation.* Curtis Walker provides damming criticism, comparing Ali G with Al Jolson:

> The only real voice of dissent among the six black comedians interviewed for the *New Nation* article came from Curtis Walker, who called Baron Cohen and his material 'quite offensive'. He claimed that Baron Cohen was trading clichés and stereotypical language in an act reminiscent of Al Jolson and former British TV series *Love Thy Neighbour.* He found it 'degrading and sad' that Ali G was catching people's attention and even being featured in *New Nation.* 'I don't like the concept of a white guy playing a black guy anyway and when he is playing to a stupid stereotype it is even worse. People have to ask themselves just what it is they are laughing at'. (Howells, 2006: 161)

Two years later, at the premier of *Ali G Indahouse* (2002), Peter Akinti, the editor of *Untold,* organised a protest against Ali G on the basis that the act is racist:

> He is the new Al Jolson - he's effectively blacked up to take the piss out of a stereotype of young black men that is deeply offensive. He is a white Jewish Cambridge graduate, and uses the word 'nigger' and asks 'Is it 'cos I is Black'. (Kelso, 2002)

While there are debated readings of minstrelsy, and we saw in Chapter Five that it too was polysemic, many elements of minstrelsy appear in Ali G. The postmodern minstrelsy presented forms a liquid racism, it is not as solid as the original form and the partiality of each depiction adds to this. It is also specifically presented as a coherent reading in media debate. So while Walker and Akinti highlight the reading of Ali G as a minstrel, they miss the necessary ambivalent and liquid aspects of the performance that erase this meaning. In the case of Ali G, the partiality is encouraged by the lack of blackface and the appearance of other meanings. One other liquid racist meaning that submerges postmodern minstrelsy is ethno-cultural hybrid racism.

Ethno-Cultural Hybrid Racism

At one point in *Ali G Indahouse, The Movie,* Ali G thinks back to when he first met his girlfriend, 'me Julie', on the dance floor of a night club. In the flashback, Ali G is a white man with shoulder length hair, dressed in a grungy vest top reminiscent of the attire of a heavy metal fan. This scene represents the clearest authorial statement on the character's ethnicity - that he is a 'wigger' - a white man pretending to be black. It is supported in the film when Ali G wins the Staines by-election and is announced by the

returning officer as Alistair Graham. Interestingly, of the three readings of his racial identity, this is most often described as satirical or least problematic. Rather than this, in this section I argue that it represents an emerging liquid 'ethno-cultural hybrid racism'.

Ali G as a 'wigger', as a satire of young whites, is described in the extract below from a fan posting on the BBC website after the initial airing of *Ali G in da USA*[iii]:

> To say he isn't funny either shows a real lack of understanding about the concept of Ali, or a lack of a sense of humour. To say he is racist is just plain idiocy - he is making a joke of young white Brits who dress and act like black gangsters to the point where they are almost convinced they are black gangsters themselves. To have to explain this really is disappointing - get a life. *Andy, UK.* (BBC News, 2003)

Howells also describes this meaning: '[t]he assumption here is that Ali G is a satire on British white suburbanites who affect the style and attitude of black (and especially American black), inner city gang members' (2006: 166). Gilroy suggests that many reactions to the character naïvely saw that, if he was a 'wigger', and 'if he was not in fact pretending to be black then he could be absolved of the most serious charges of cultural theft and exploitation, which make us laugh without making us feel guilty in doing so' (2004: 148). Gilroy describes such charges of cultural theft as anachronistic while also seeing such real life 'wiggers' who mimic the character as 'hordes of illiterate juveniles and pathetic hedonists ready to hail him as their hero' (ibid: 147). Overall, I argue the reading of Ali G as a 'wigger' is by no means as unprejudicial as these commentaries suggest.

My critique begins with an outline of the connotations associated with the notions of imitation, authentic practice and identity. Ethno-cultural hybridity can be described as the mixing of cultures, both those in close proximity to one another or those connected by global media, to the extent that they impact and create altered cultural forms. An ethno-cultural hybrid racism can be described as a racism directed towards these hybrid forms, or parts of these hybrid forms, on the basis that they are 'other' and inferior because of their inauthenticity and illegitimacy. Harvey Sacks (1995) insightfully describes how activity is often interpreted as an imitation if actors transgress social boundaries. He explained that:

> If you look especially at the pre-Civil war literature on slaves - and even, indeed, some current discussions, and certainly current lay talk on the matter - one gets something that can be summarised in the sentence, 'Negroes and children are great imitators'. (1995: 479)

He goes on to explain that to be labelled an imitation relates to:

> "who owns reality" and what the import of owning it or not owning it is for some category of persons who are apparently not entitled to be seen to be doing some given social action, which they technically are perfectly able to do... the notion that, say, an adult Negro is a 'terrific imitator' is to say that what he's doing can hardly be distinguished from the thing which, if somebody else were doing it, would be seen as the real thing. (ibid)

Sacks shows how competence is sometimes judged not in relation to the ability to perform an activity but in relation to the appropriateness of the actor's social position. If Ali G is read as a 'wigger', he is read as an example of one race imitating another. Further to this, he is seen to be childish or silly - socially out of place - in his attempt to do this. This childishness is directly born from his 'imitating'. Sacks adds that, '[t]o do such activities mockingly, kiddingly, and the like, in play, is more or less explicitly to recognise that in doing them one is making no claim to doing them seriously' (ibid: 481). This comment nicely explains the amusement generated from placing the 'wigger' in humour.

When something is seen as an imitation a set of questions are asked about the activity that are not asked if the activity is seen as authentic, or in the correct social context, and in these cases 'no matter how many times one does an activity, no matter how well one does it, it's never a possession; it's always borrowed' (ibid). Ethno-cultural hybridity and its association with mixing and confusion can quite easily become the subject of racist humour, as the ridicule of inauthenticity and imitation. This racism depends on the ontological premise that white people who have 'black' mannerisms are not a part of a 'genuine' hybrid culture but in fact inauthentic social actors involved in the appropriation of 'cool' elements of an alien culture. This reading of the authenticity of the 'wigger' represents a thinly veiled class and race prejudice.

Humour that uses hybridity can produce racist meanings when laughter is generated because one social group shows an amount of ethno-cultural difference, yet from an essentialist description of culture, these differences appear mixed or partial, confused, diluted or an imitation. The hybrid appears to contain an inherent, even incompatible combination of elements. The joker still laughs at racial, ethnic or cultural difference, but it is the specific mix of hybrid elements in the 'wigger' and their classification as imitation that are seen as humorous. So when Ali G says 'is it 'cos I is black?' and the audience believe that Ali G is not black but a 'wigger', the joke centres on the 'wigger' being unaware of what he is, or what he should be. This creates a joke because Ali G

does not know what he is; because he actually thinks that he is black, yet he clearly is not, and laughs at the hybrid that believes himself to be authentic. This is because, while it may appear that we are laughing at racial misidentification, this misidentification cannot be disconnected from how misidentification is constructed, which is always a definition shaped by status laden readings of social structure.

Anti-Asian Racism

The third liquid racism in Ali G and media reactions to him is also an ethno-cultural hybrid racism but one more concisely described as anti-Asian racism. This liquid racism directly relates to the reading of Baron Cohen as a white man pretending to be an Asian pretending to be black.

British Asian hybridity has a recent and progressive record of depiction in comedy, which often centres on ambivalence in hybrid identities. The frustrated hybridity of Sanjeev in *The Kumars at No. 42*, many of the sketches in *Goodness Gracious Me* (Bhaskar, S. et al, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003) and the comedy dramas *East is East* (2000) and *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) all depict British Asians negotiating ethno-cultural hybridity and racism.

The reading of Ali G as a white man pretending to be an Asian pretending to be black is a reading that is not sensitive to Asian hybridity in the same way that any of the above examples are. The meaning initially develops because 'Ali' is often assumed to be an Asian name. Rojek identifies this: '[t]he name 'Ali' suggests that the character may in fact be of Asian descent, thus embodying another layer within the comedy of role and status confusion' (2001: 23-4). Howells explains that, '[t]he concept here is that certain young British Asians nowadays adapt the street style of British and American blacks because they consider black culture 'cooler' than their own' (2006: 166). While we see Ali G exposed as 'Alistair Graham' in *Ali G Indahouse*, the 'truth' of this information also becomes a part of the increasing polysemia in other media:

> Interestingly, original series producer Harry Thompson (according to *The Sunday Times*): 'suggested the Asian name Ali G, further blurring the character's ethnic identity'. They quoted Thompson: 'if he had a whiff of Islam about him, we thought people would be afraid to challenge him... If Muslims took offence, there was a plan to explain that the name was short for "Alistair Graham". (ibid)

Ali G as a 'wigger', as Alistair Graham, becomes a smokescreen for his Asian identity. The polysemia takes hold as the assertion of Ali G as an Asian pretending to be black negates the idea of Ali G as a 'wigger' (and vice-versa).

This reading, like the Ali G as a 'wigger' reading, does not receive a great deal of criticism on the grounds of racism. Media descriptions often state the meaning without seeing it as problematic. Howells quotes two such examples from the *Guardian*:

> As one impassioned reader wrote to *Guardian* columnist Gary Younge: 'Ali G is ASIAN. That's half the joke; Asian guys trying to be cool like black guys'. Stuart Jefferies, also writing in the *Guardian,* agreed that Sacha Baron Cohen was 'a jewish comedian posing as an Asian wannabe rapper' who 'plunders and mangles' Caribbean speech patterns and hip-hop culture while at the same time embracing the 'homophobic and sexist attitudes as well as the drugs purportedly beloved of gangsta rappers'. (ibid)

Jefferies' comments, when read through Sacks' description of the link between imitation and social position, can be seen to implicitly authenticate yet degrade black culture, while simultaneously ridiculing any emerging Asian hybrid culture as a poor imitation. The rhetoric of Jefferies' comments towards black culture disguises this degradation by the positioning of positive Caribbean characteristics with the negative gangsta rapper characteristics. Once again, there is the implicit assumption that Asian Ali G's are downgrading, are embracing an inferior culture, and are mimicking that culture badly.

As in other parts of the polysemia, Baron Cohen includes elements that throw us off the scent of the reading and prevent us from viewing it fully. For example, Ali G makes several comments about 'pakis' in the third person that would suggest that he is not one (Baron Cohen, 1999). He asks Jacob Rees-Mogg, son of the aristocrat Lord Rees-Mogg, during a discussion on social class, 'what class is pakis in?' (ibid). Most such comments are problematic yet seem to have remained uncriticised because of close-by satirical meanings in this early work. The description of this meaning, the comments of Thompson on Islam and the potential Muslim Ali G, lead to the question of why the character is not criticised with the same ferocity as other satire aimed at Muslims, for example, in comparison to the attention given to the recent Prophet Mohammed cartoons (examined in Chapter Seven). It seems that the critique of humour aimed at Muslims remains focused on ostensive depictions of stereotypical images of fundamentalist Islamists (e.g. The Runnymede Trust, 1997; Modood, 2006a, 2006b,

2006c; Sardar, 2006), with characters such as Ali G slipping under the radar. This is perhaps encouraged by the character's liquidity.

Proteophobia and Proteophilia in Reactions to Ali G

Using Bauman's concepts of 'proteophobia' and 'proteophilia', I now outline how certain media and sociological responses to Ali G have polarised as reactions to ambiguity that display adoration or phobia, thus attempting to fix his liquidity. While the character himself generates both non-racist and racist meanings, it is argued that individual, media and sociological interpretive reactions themselves often form a problematic, and in some cases, racist response to Ali G, which fails to accept the intrinsic and deliberate ambivalence of the comedy, and which functions specifically to remove this ambivalence.

In Chapters Three, Four and Five we saw how the second element of Wieviorka's dual logic of racism - exclusion - is expressed in racist humour as proteophobia. This takes the form of derogatory, disposing or destructive images of the 'other' in humour, and is usually the product of authorial intention. In this chapter and the last, a change in tropes aimed at the 'other' sees humour become more polysemic and more ambiguous in its classification and sentiments towards the 'other'. Likewise, as humour becomes the property of the 'other', proteophilia begins to emerge, with both tropes appearing as reactions to the comedians or comic objects. So while the liquid racism of postmodern humour has a decreased ability to act rhetorically, the tropes that aid this process are still employed to attempt fixity.

The two concepts are directly applicable to a number of media descriptions surrounding Ali G, which contains ambivalence that some descriptions seek to dispel. Therefore, certain responses to Ali G react to him as an ambivalent outsider who either disturbs the normal methods of defining the content of social space and is in need of exile, or attempt to assimilate him into the enjoyment of social space before he is similarly discarded.

To reiterate, proteophobia is fear or hatred of this multiform. Ali G draws on and is described by stereotypes that match Bauman's description of stereotypical classifications of the outsider. These responses generally originate from the political Right. Bauman describes how proteophobia often describes the outsider as being in

opposition to rational, non-ambivalent characteristics. These characteristics include dirtiness, unreliability, being erratic, laziness, being immoral, dishonest and promiscuous (Bauman, 1993: 162). This description of proteophobia matches a description and critical attack on Ali G by Linda Lee-Potter in the *Daily Mail*:

> This week on Radio 1, Ali G poured out a sick torrent of obscenities. He was vicious, vile and cruel on a programme which is listened to mostly by children. He called Sara Cox a bitch, made suggestive remarks about lesbian sex, ejaculation and homosexuals. He then described Gareth Gates... as 'spasticated', and rounded off his nasty bout of self-indulgence, which he no doubt saw as boldness, by using the word 'motherf*****' ... Ali G feels neither shame nor regret.... because his unpleasant, sleazy suggestiveness was planned, orchestrated and deliberate. He thinks he's a funny, courageous revolutionary smashing down inhibitions and conventions. No doubt he believes that anyone who was shocked is puerile and suburban.... Radio 1 has a huge influence on adolescents and the subliminal message they receive day in day out is that it's smart to be rude and foul.... The BBC still has many qualities but it's time it stopped pandering to the nastiest side of human nature. (Lee-Potter, 2002)

Lee-Potter reacts to Ali G as an individual - she misidentifies him - missing the point that this episode, whether offensive or not, was a part of a comic act. The proteophobia expressed relates to Ali G, in his misidentified condition, being morally deficient and socially alien for Lee-Potter. It can be seen to deal with the anxiety, disgust and possible ambivalence provoked in Lee-Potter's normal moral categories. Lee-Potter expresses this by describing Ali G with a very specific moral meaning; he is morally lax and unpredictable, and she expresses this through her disgust at the type of language used at a particular time towards a specific audience, all factors involved in the demarcation of social space. It is evident that Lee-Potter's description fits Bauman's outline. It is also clear the ambivalence Bauman describes as being generated from the stranger/outsider exists and is heightened in Ali G because his multiple meanings resist a singular definition. Because of this, it is apparent that this description of the character is particularly active in its proteophobia. Exclusion for Lee-Potter means that Ali G should not be heard on breakfast radio.

Proteophobic reactions to Ali G also occur from people he encounters in person. For example, the vitriolic reaction of the environmental protester in *Ali G, innit* (Baron Cohen, 1999) displays anger because Ali G interferes with the serious protest and so fails to see the protest through the same political lens as the protester. It is Ali G's overall and ostensive difference in appearance, ideology and behaviour that provokes the protester to shout 'fuck off - this is serious' (ibid) in response to Ali G's human beat-box, which is performed through the protester's loudspeaker. This act challenges the staging of the protester's political position by showing the gap, or area of ambiguity,

between her intentions and actions, and the plan to build a bypass. These two politico-cognitive plans are incommensurable, hence the intervention of Ali G's human beat-box serves to mock the protester and highlight the potential failings of her particular politico-cognitive map. In essence, Ali G represents a disruptive alien, moving into a cognitive space that he is not welcome in and so removal is once again called for. Both this and the previous example highlight symbolic exclusion or exile. The context of a reality television setting for this interaction encourages such a response because Ali G is naturally seen as real.

Bauman describes proteophilia as a reaction to otherness or multiform that is connected to aesthetic spacing. It appears after proteophobia, once the space has been made safe for the viewer, and involves the consumption of the 'other' through deification and, once the novelty has worn off, disposal. Not all media responses to Ali G are overly hostile and express proteophobia. Many from a central or leftist political stance - from fans - mirror the tendency of proteophilia. These responses express and define Ali G's ambiguity and so are involved in a process of inscription. Here is a general summary from the 2000 'Ali G debate' in the *Guardian*:

> The expectations and anticipations surrounding the new Ali G series is such that industry insiders are going to extremes to get access to information. You could be forgiven for thinking we were about to witness something as significant as Princess Diana's Panorama routine. (Collins, 2000)

This hints at both deification and excitement aimed at Ali G from inside the media. It is the inconsequential play of Ali G, the visual unreality and ambiguity, that becomes the focus of aesthetic consumption and so enters a process of ambiguity management in the mind of the proteophile. This is preferred to confrontation with ambiguity in other social spaces. Proteophobia has made the social space safe for the actor's proteophilia and an interaction with play reduces the need for, and distinguishes this process from, the more disturbing proteophobic reactions to ambivalence in cognitive mapping. In essence, the protean loving journalist can revel without fear in the debate, and the ambivalence, that is generated by the character. Proteophilia is also displayed by some of Ali G's interviewees:

> Sometimes they totally forget who they are. And they come out with a totally different side of themselves. Some try to appear cool with Ali G and down with the kids... Boutros Boutros-Ghali kept on telling me he used to be a bit of a bully in school, and used to muck around. They want Ali G's approval. They're in the room with a total idiot, and yet they're seeking his approval. As if it somehow makes them cooler. (Baron Cohen in Heffernan, 2004)

This mimicking of Ali G is also demonstrated by celebrities who dress up in Ali G outfits and copy his speech through mock patios or by taking part in raps. This forms a specific assimilatory and consumptive reaction to difference or multiform. Paul Daniels in *Ali G Aiii* (Baron Cohen, 2000) provides an excellent example of this.

Felix Dexter describes the 'middle class' laugh at Ali G and highlights the well-policed space needed for the manifestation of proteophilia:

> A lot of the humour is laughing at black street culture and it is being celebrated because it allows the liberal middle classes to laugh at that culture in a safe context where they can retain their sense of political correctness. (Gibson, 2000)

The multiform of Ali G allows a safe mockery of the 'other' without those laughing having to feel guilty for their reactions to otherness. After Ali G's initial success, there were mounting calls for his removal, not based on charges of racism, but because the novelty had worn off. The BBC website published a number of such views:

> 'Okay so Ali G can still make me laugh, I'm not denying that. But when something is over it's over' Dan, UK.
>
> 'Stale and well past its sell-by-date. The characters have to be killed off, and replaced' Colin B, UK.
>
> 'Is it just me or has the novelty of having him on telly worn off?' Zak, Leicester, UK
> (BBC News, 2003)

Alongside these media and individual reactions, proteophilia also emerges in a sociological description of the character. Gilroy (2002, 2004) draws on the concept of proteophobia in his analysis of Ali G, arguing that media debates of Ali G's ethnicity and hybridity are distinctively proteophobic (2002: 4-5). Gilroy (2004) outlines opposed tendencies of melancholia and conviviality in British culture. Ali G is seen as an example of the convivial. While Gilroy's account is productive to an extent, because he does not employ the concept of proteophilia, he overemphasises the role of exclusionary tendencies in media descriptions of the character and is unable to properly describe less confrontational or non-racist descriptions of Ali G in publications such as the *Guardian* (e.g. Collins, 2000; Rayner, 2002). Proteophobia and proteophilia are best used together, thus highlighting how actors from different positions in the political spectrum have different methods of resolving the ambivalence of the 'other'. These methods form a complex interaction that polarises responses and opinions, so leaving little space for the existence or acceptance of multiform.

More importantly, as well as not employing proteophilia, Gilroy exhibits a proteophilic tendency of his own. This is exhibited by his general deification of Ali G as an exemplar of an emerging British hybrid and convivial culture, which is presented as a central meaning in the comedy. This deification is best highlighted when Gilroy states of Baron Cohen's lack of comment on the character, 'I'm sure he knows that a new sense of what it means to be English is at stake. No wonder he wants to conceal the political intelligence that guides this liberating project' (2002: 5). This celebratory comment forms a part of a discussion that downplays the liquid racism generated by the character, without providing an adequate theorisation of why these meanings are mistaken or less 'central'. This central meaning is also used as a means of critiquing the influence of US hip hop culture on black British youth culture:

> It is significant that the central unifying joke underpinning all his work is supplied by an antipathy towards the stultifying US styles and habits that have all but crushed local forms of black vernacular and replaced them with the standardised and uniform global products of hip hop consumer culture. (ibid: 3)

The articulation of any central meaning in Ali G is problematic because of his layered construction, and requires a certain focus, or a fixation on certain facets of the comedy, that inevitably leaves some material unexamined, and interpretations from other positions unheard or obscured. This creates the potential for an account that will collapse in on itself as other meanings appear around it. So, for example, in arguing against Gilroy, it is debatable whether US habitual practises have crushed local black vernacular in the UK, where regional variations are highly prevalent. Moreover, there are several examples, especially in *Ali G innit* (1999), where hip hop culture is positively affirmed, often at the expense of British establishment dispositions. An interview with Sir Rhodes Boyson, a former Minister of Education, highlights this:

> Ali G: do you believe kids should be caned? [Ali G sniffs his fingers, which is a reference to nasal drug taking].
> Sir Rhodes: I do.
> AG: You do! Wicked man, you believe kids should be caned [sniffs fingers again]. Even in school?
> SR: Even in schools.
> AG: Do you think, Sir Rhodes, that if you get caned in school you can't concentrate as well, 'cos a lot of people out there say that if you're getting caned....
> SR: Well I was caned and I've concentrated all my life.
> AG: You were caned? Respect man, respect.
> SR: It shouldn't be done badly.
> AG: Yeah you got to have good stuff.
> SR: You have to have rules.
> AG: You've got to have good cane.
> SR: You have to have a good cane.
> (Baron Cohen, 1999)

The inability of Rhodes-Boyson to make the linguistic gestalt shift, to observe slippage around the meaning of 'caned', creates the joke. It is Boyson's failure to move between the language of different habitual groups that allows Ali G to establish the pun and to be, in effect, more socially skilled than the established Sir Rhodes, whose political beliefs seem so coherent and unambiguous in his serious realm. Clearly the vernacular of Ali G is not the subject of the joke in this example. As Lockyer and Pickering suggest on this interview: 'Popular culture rose in splendid ascendancy over official culture' (2005c: 190).

Although Gilroy might reply that of course his central meaning does not appear in all examples, the footing on which he asserts its centrality remains unstable because of the simultaneous emergence of contrary meanings. Gilroy's commentary falls down because he simultaneously privileges his own preferred meaning while also highlighting the ambiguity of the character. This prevents Gilroy from emphasising the postmodern style of the humour, a type of humour that has no central point, whose meaning morphs and is manipulated as conditions and viewing subjects change. In Ali G, it is the lack of fixation that is central, rather than any one interpretation of the assemblage.

Gilroy continues to understate the comparable textual stability of various elements of Ali G's assemblage and confidently describes Ali G through a central meaning that has a specific political logic:

> The character of Ali G should be understood as a subtle reply to the fact that the influential pages of publications like *Prospect* and the *Salisbury Review* were groaning under the weight of speculations about the pathological characteristics of black culture. (2004: 148)

While Ali G is a 'subtle reply' to the centre Left and Right, those who instead criticise Ali G for racism and/or cultural theft are described by Gilroy as 'anachronistic' (ibid: 146). Gilroy continues in his veneration of the character:

> If we accept Ali G as his feature film presented him, that is, as a young white Briton, we can appreciate him as a comment upon as well as an ambassador from the emergent, multicultural Britain that exists, largely unnoticed and always unvalued... (ibid)

I argue that the basis of the humour involved in seeing Ali G as a white Briton - a 'wigger' - is an emerging ethno-cultural hybrid racism. It remains difficult to

conceptualise exactly how the 'wigger' Ali G makes a significant ambassadorial comment for Gilroy.

Gilroy articulates one specific meaning that emerges from one particular habitus formation, and which interacts with the assemblage of meanings generated by the character. While he acknowledges the assemblage, Gilroy's reading remains both partial and problematic because he exaggerates and deifies one aspect of it, yet can provide no basis on which to establish or assert this supposed semantic superiority. Not only does he fail to employ or analyse proteophilia, he expresses it.

Non-Racist Readings: Mocking the Establishment

This section outlines some of the non-racist readings of Ali G which serve to complicate the assemblage and increases its liquidity.

Rojek outlines how '[t]he comedy lies not only in Ali G's stringent sincerity but also in the jaw-dropping credulity of the powerful, often rich, people he interviews, who take the Ali G character at face value' (2001: 24). Mocking the establishment is one theme that humour studies has theorised extensively, usually as an important means of resistance to dominant power relations. The theme has a tradition in British television comedy, although it is relatively new, which reflects wider changes in popular attitudes towards social stratification. Peter Cook's mockery of Harold Macmillian in the 1960s constituted a radical form of comic expression (Bloomfield, 2005), and an early example of comic mockery of the establishment, although the tradition of political satire is much older.

This style of comedy is specifically double-edged. Returning to Harvey Sacks and the previous discussion of imitation, he adds:

> We get a correlate to the fact that 'Negroes and children are great imitators' which is 'Negroes and children are great mockers'. Which is imitation 'in such a fashion as to make it clear that you're not seriously doing it, but that you're competent at it - and, of course, treating it in a fairly negative way. Children mock their parents, lessers their betters, students their teacher, etc., when the given thing, were it to be done in an unmocked fashion, would be 'but an imitation' (1995: 480).

Mocking does not simply undermine dominant power relations. Sacks suggests there might always be an implicit problem involved in mocking the establishment and while it may seem to be a form of resistance to dominant power relations, the act of mocking,

through appearing as not serious, is constrained by its connection to imitation or to 'not being real'. Mocking, therefore, cannot transgress the social boundary. Despite this, the humour of mockery *has* a rhetorical potential, but it is a potential that negotiates, and succeeds or fails, on the basis of the congruence between the comic and the mocked.

In the early material, Baron Cohen interviews members of the establishment who have no idea who he is. These interviews often appear to mock both the interviewee's political beliefs and their methods of habitual distinction. This is successful because no one knows who Ali G is. Later, once immersed in a complex symbolic landscape of meanings related to ethnic origin, he becomes a celebrity figure that exists in stark contrast to his original state. He is recognisable, understood and endowed with a certain amount of celebrity capital. In the early work, Ali G gives each interviewee a similar satirical attack, treating each political position equally. To Ron Davies, the former Labour candidate for First Secretary of Wales, he says, '[s]o what is good about Wales 'cos with no disrespect, me heard it's crap.... For them people out there, what they don't understand is why is you lot blowing up the Catholics?' (Baron Cohen, 1999). Another example shows Ali G mocking Sir Rhodes Boyson, with some words of agreement on teaching the imperial over the metric system:

> Ali G: Why don't they teach proper math in schools?
> Sir Rhodes Boyson: What do you mean by proper Maths?
> AG: Why do they teach in kilos and grams when you should really *deal* in ounces, quarter of ounces, eights of ounces. Why don't they modernise and teach in ounces?
> SR: Well I prefer the old ones.
> AG: Aiii.
> SR: As being a traditionalist, I would have the old things back again.
> AG: Wicked and you need to know about quarter ounces, eight of ounces, all that sort of thing.
> SR: If you were doing baking or anything like that.
> AG: Aiii baking, for real.
> SR: I bake my own breakfast everyday.
> AG: Aiii I bake me own breakfast.
> SR: Very good.
> (ibid)

The established Boyson is mocked through punning of the word 'deal' which means, for Boyson, simple usage or conduct relating to general transactions, whereas for Ali G and a particular section of the audience it suggests the buying and selling of drugs, as the imperial system of measurement is commonly used to measure cannabis and other drugs in small transactions. In a third example, Ali G mocks the most highly decorated British solider, Major-General Ken Perkins.

Ali G: What about the SOS? They is wicked no?
Ken Perkins: The SAS?
AG: They is the hardest?
KP: They are the best soldiers in the world, probably, I'd say yes.
AG: Is it hard to get in?
KP: Extremely hard yes.
AG: Does it help if you have already killed someone?
(ibid)

The traditional deference with which such a decorated soldier would be addressed is turned on its head or realigned by the stereotypical street values of violence and indiscipline, which are also sometimes expressed in hip hop language.

Of significance in these examples is that the comedy, while satirical, does not simply mock the establishment and therefore attack dominant power relations in a way that might be progressive to social equality. Sacks argues mocking is a specifically comic activity and is distinctly connected to imitation. The out-of-place social actor must negotiate the rhetorical potential, against the simplistic presentation and confirmation of existing social relations, if they are to achieve effective mockery. While Baron Cohen is quite effective in these examples, the later expressions of Ali G, and the obvious liquid racist readings, seek to add to the instability of mockery.

Borat Sagdiyev and Negative Kazakh Stereotyping

Baron Cohen's Borat Sagdiyev, commonly known as Borat, the anthropological interviewer from Kazakhstan, is less ambiguous than Ali G but has raised eyebrows in relation to the generation of prejudice, especially with the international box office success of *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006). I argue that Borat is also a character that expresses liquid racism.

In what Gilroy explains as an extension of Baron Cohen's Montesquieuian stranger, of the 'other' that gives critique of the home territory (2004: 78-9), Borat appears as an anti-Semitic, homophobic, misogynist who is also cruel toward animals. In the *Guardian*, Morris outlines Borat's arrival at the MTV Europe Music Awards show:

> The character arrived in an "Air Kazakh" propeller plane controlled by a one-eyed pilot clutching a vodka bottle. Later he described an all-woman band as "international singing prostitutes" and said it was brave to have Madonna – "a genuine transvestite" - on the show. (Morris, 2005)

Baron Cohen can, at times, be seen to attack traditional prejudices through the character, but ambivalence developed because of the extended period of lack of comment on its meaning. On the one hand, and as one Kazakh argues, 'Borat's not making fun of Kazakhs, he's making fun of Americans' (2003), yet on the other, the jokes about fictional Kazakh traditions and customs are not dependant on Americans being present in the context of the joke and often simply encourages humour directed at the 'other'. Overall, the Borat character has received criticism in the West for his anti-Semitism, and in the East for his negative Kazakh stereotyping. In particular, the Kazakh government have voiced concern:

> The great and good of Kazakhstan are getting tired of having to clear up wild misconceptions about their republic. They are tired of having to insist that shooting a dog and then having a party is not a favourite national pastime and of denying that their wine is made of fermented horse urine and that women are kept in cages. (Morris, 2005)

These emerging Kazakh stereotypes, and others such as 'cow-punching' (Chortle, 2005), have led to protest and threats of legal action.

> The Kazakh Foreign Ministry described his portrayal as "utterly unacceptable, being a concoction of bad taste and ill manners which is completely incompatible with ethics and civilised behaviour". The ministry later threatened to take legal action against the comedian. (BBC News, 2005)

For many viewing the humour outside of Kazakhstan these stereotypes are new, they do not belong in the repertoire of ethnic, racial and national stereotypes that usually appear in humour. It would not need a great deal of empathy to see that Kazakhs might be unhappy with the negative publicity they receive through the Borat character, although there is an element of hyperbole in some of the responses that add to the humorous nature of the situation. For example, the *Guardian* quote the Kazakh foreign ministry spokesman: 'Yerzhan Ashykbayev, said yesterday: "We do not rule out that Mr Cohen is serving someone's political order designed to present Kazakhstan and its people in a derogatory way" (Morris, 2005).

The Borat character is influenced by two dominant themes in Jewish humour. First, self-deprecation, and second, humour directed towards fascist, fanatical or abusive power relationships - as Dorinson suggests, 'Jewish wit shifts from paranoia to masochism' (1998: 29). Baron Cohen's early career highlights this heritage:

> Together with his younger brother, Erran, he ran a comedy club in Hampstead where they performed a song called 'Shvitzing' (Yiddish for sweating), about two

> old Hassidic Jews who would strip down to their underpants because their black felt garb was too hot. They took the sketch to the BBC. It was turned down for being offensive. (Rayner, 2002)

Both themes have a linage in Jewish comedy. Dorinson (1998) discusses pain in the comedy of Lenny Bruce, Mel Brookes and Woody Allen. The latter displays many examples of self-deprecating humour, which he regularly connects with the themes of self-analysis and internalised personal suffering. Likewise, the jokes of Rodney Dangerfield contain similar examples. Born Jacob Cohen, Dangerfield's humour is exemplary of self-deprecation. Ronald Bergan writes in Dangerfield's *Guardian* obituary that he 'suffered from depression, and that many of his one-liners were derived from an unhappy childhood and personal pain: "I could tell that my parents hated me. My bath toy was a toaster"' (Bergan, 2004). While such jokes are inspired by Dangerfield's own life, they also correspond with the wider trend of self-deprecation in Jewish humour encouraged by the particular habitus. Baron Cohen's comedy balances the theme of self-deprecation with exposing racism through presenting Borat as anti-Semitic in order to extract anti-Semitism from interviewees.

For the second theme, that of laughing at power holders, there are also habitus elements that explain why this particular trend is prevalent in Jewish humour, which also relate to historical experiences of marginalisation, persecution and victimisation. Freud (1991 [1905]) mentions this theme, as Billig explains, 'many of the Jewish jokes that he included ridicule the logic of the world. They bring the conventionally successful down to earth and delight in the subversion of authority' (2002: 454). Davies explains that many Jewish jokes 'outwit a prejudiced anti-Semite in a particularly clever way' (1998: 80). Mel Brooks provides examples: in his spoof western, *Blazing Saddles* (1974), a black sheriff is appointed to a redneck town as the film mocks dominant racist attitudes and *The Producers* provides a musical mockery of Nazism (Brockes, 2004). There are many more examples. One in the UK would be the character Sol Bernstein, created by Steve Jackson. Examples of his humour follow: '"he could pull a big crowd," he says of Hitler, "but he could never get a laugh… I'm a survivor," he says. "I survived the camps - the holiday camps"' (Cook, 2003).

Borat, as a native of Kazakhstan, is often depicted as an anti-Semite:

> Virginia Heffernan: Is Borat an anti-Semite?
> Sacha Baron Cohen: Yeah, yeah. Part of the idea of Borat is to get people to feel relaxed enough that they fully open up. And they say things that they never would on normal TV. So if they are anti-Semitic or racist or sexist, they'll say so.
> (Heffernan, 2004)

It is not just explicit expressions of racism, anti-Semitism or sexism that Borat extracts from the people he interviews. He highlights how people will often implicitly excuse racist expressions. At a dating agency, Borat was asked about his preferences, '"what about race? You're open to all races?" "Umm yes but no Jew", "no Jewish, okay"' (Baron Cohen, 2003). At an acting class a comparable comment goes unchallenged. He is asked by the acting instructor '"let's say you're in a movie", "yes I have been in a movie: Dirty Jew", "okay"' (ibid). Similarly, at a country and western bar in Tucson, he infamously sings, 'throw the Jew down the well, so my country can be free' (ibid), which provokes no protest from his audience.

The US and UK box office hit *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006) has only served to entrench the confused, liquid or postmodern element of Borat's relationship to racism. The elements that appear in the film include its anti-Semitism, on which Borat states '[a]t first, the Kazakh censors wouldn't let me release this movie, because of anti-Semitism... But then they decide that there was just enough' (Strauss, 2006: 2). As a reversed discourse, this follows the theme of much Jewish humour, but it could also be read and enjoyed as anti-Semitism. Interestingly, when Borat responds in subtitled Kazakh during the film, he is actually speaking Hebrew in an Israeli accent - thus presenting a specific in-joke for Hebrew speakers - and presents another hidden, liquid reading, as a fictional Jewish journalist pretending to be a Kazakh journalist (Garay, 2006). A third element sees the Kazakh stereotyping mentioned above, which can be taken as a stereotyping of ex-soviet backwardness and Muslims, because Kazakhstan is 47 per cent Muslim (religioustolerance.org, 2001).

Then there is the authorial reading - Baron Cohen, in a rare interview, has sought to clear up some of the confusion over Borat: 'The joke is not on Kazakhstan. I think the joke is on people who can believe that the Kazakhstan I describe can exist' (Baron Cohen in Strauss, 2006: 2). He adds: 'I think part of the movie shows the absurdity of holding any form of racial prejudice, whether it is hatred of African-Americans or of Jews' (ibid). Baron Cohen sees a functional and serious task guiding his comedy, a task that is paradoxically and frequently not completed by the postmodern structure of the humour, or its increased polysemia, and the surrounding dichotomous media debate.

There are also proteophobic reactions to Borat, although no reactions of proteophilia were found. This implies there are very few positive aesthetic reactions to the otherness of Borat, or that cognitive spacing and proteophobia was still underway. The snobbish

or over-serious often express proteophobic reactions towards Borat. His reception at the Middleton Place Plantation, South Carolina, a working museum of life in the American old south, appears proteophobic when Borat mentions slavery, as he scratches at the veneer of civility to uncover the 'hidden' recent history of the area (Baron Cohen, 2003). There are other subtle or non-verbal proteophobic reactions to Borat, such as the actress who recoils from him as he tries to kiss her after a disastrous improvisation class (ibid). In these examples, Borat is seen as an outsider with incommensurable cultural differences that might as well be placed at a distance. Borat has also been physically excluded from a territory:

> He is already barred from returning to Arizona after an incident in which Borat recorded an interview with a new-age healer in Sedona. When the cultist asked him to relax on a giant stage. Borat took it too literally and, naked but for a towel, became sexually aroused. (Chittenden, 2004)

Conclusion

The chapter has outlined an additional complication in race and ethnic humour in its relationship to the generation of racism. We saw how Ali G is formed as ambiguous and misidentified as a real social actor. We then saw that the character can be read to create three liquid racisms, liquid because they each erase the other two readings. This has led to the character being described as racist by various commentators but also to the character being theoretically difficult to analyse and critique. Overall, the comedy cannot attach itself to, or support, a serious discourse in the same non-contradictory way that other forms of humour can because it produces both racist and non-racist meanings simultaneously.

In Ali G, proteophobia and proteophilia were shown to emerge as responses to the character, each as readings of the ambivalent comic form. Then, non-racist readings were highlighted as adding further confusion. Overall, none of the meanings are dominant and so serious racism is not rhetorically affected as much through this type of comedy. In postmodern humour, meaning is far too saturated for 'true' meaning to develop, hence media attention has not developed a stable interpretation on which to build a critique, remaining in a debate about meaning. After this, Borat was also signalled as being in a similar postmodern process and also as generating liquid racism. Borat is thus also impossible to place in unambiguous definitions.

At this stage in the Ali G debate it seems to be a sociological truism that Ali G is polysemic. Specifically though, what has not been established in any convincing fashion is how to deal with the racist readings of the character. The concept of liquid racism can explain how polysemic expressions do not play by the same rules that older embodied or cultural racisms observed, so while postmodern humour may leave the analyst in a state of reflexive ambivalence, or, if old concepts are relied on, in a vulnerable or untenable position, liquid racism allows for a more complete description. Importantly, it is in the habitus that the humour receives the most fixity and which is expressed in dichotomous media debate. It is in the specificity and relativity, or the univociality, of the habitus that experiences of racism in postmodern humour have effect, but these racisms are never total, and always remain in a process of erasure.

Chapter Seven

Postmodern Satire: The Case of the Prophet Muhammad Cartoons

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how certain forms of humour become increasingly polysemic in postmodernity and can produce liquid racism. It was also explained that because of the increased layering in postmodern humour, the reading of any particular 'total' or 'strong' interpretation requires the reader to erase other interpretations of the humorous message.

This chapter develops this idea in relation to another case study, the January 2006 reaction to the October 2005 publication of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The controversy arose because it is considered blasphemous by many Muslims, but not all, to create images of the Prophet Muhammad. I argue that the meaning of the cartoons is multidimensional, and that their analysis is significantly more complex than most commentators acknowledge. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the events surrounding the publication of the cartoons, before concentrating on a description of the cartoons themselves, specifically considering the two cartoons that are usually viewed as most offensive. These two are given a specific analysis with a view to outlining the trajectory of liquid meanings produced by their incongruity. Following this, I outline the general arguments of those who consider the cartoons offensive, evaluating the concepts of blasphemy, and importantly for this thesis, Islamophobia and racism in relation to the cartoons. Third, I outline the liberal secular defence of the publication of the cartoons, on the basis of freedom of speech, and explain how the cartoons fit the European tradition of satire. Finally, some comments are made on the relationship between the rise of postmodernity and fundamentalism, as while I argue the cartoons have a postmodern dimension to them, so too does Islamic fundamentalism[42], which is the target of their intended meaning and present in some reactions to them.

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[42] Fundamentalism (Islamic and other forms) is defined as an appeal 'to the inerrancy of sacred texts to legitimate conceptions of purity' (Springett, 2003: 325). It has also been defined as fixating on 'society's desertion of eternally valid, divinely revealed and textually literal received principles of order' (Riesbrodt, 1993: 16 in ibid: 328-9). These cultural discursive interpretations can be linked to violent activity, but they are not always.

An Analysis of the Prophet Muhammad Cartoons

Twelve cartoons depicting the Islamic Prophet Muhammad were originally published in the conservative Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 30th September 2005. The events that followed have been well documented (e.g. Modood, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Hansen, 2006a, 2006b; Bleich, 2006; O'Leary, 2006; Carens, 2006) and so this chapter begins with what has not been covered in these accounts, the specific detail of the incongruous and rhetorical structure of the cartoons, and the effect this had on the debates and reactions that followed. These debates and reactions take the specific dimension of liquid racism. I argue that the satirical and comic frame created by the cartoons specifically allowed for, and encouraged, tension and debate of a liquid comic frame that does not allow for a clear outcome or 'winner', and perhaps follows Jonathan Swift's image of satire as 'a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own' (Swift, 1984: 104 in Stott, 2005: 114).

So while all ideological signs are polysemic and can be read in a number of ways, I have shown throughout this thesis that humour is significantly different. In Chapter One, the ability of humour to generate ridicule was emphasised as an important factor in the emergence of the superiority theory. Ridicule is created because of the structure of humorous incongruity, which is a device that can divert literal meaning rhetorically. Therefore, humour is 'just humour', and not necessarily truthful, yet it is formed by a rhetorical device that has the paradoxical ability to have an impact on truth perceptions. In the case of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons, a critique of religious fundamentalism or a comment on freedom of speech is placed in a satirical incongruity that has a destabilising and unpredictable rhetorical effect, and allows for the creation of multiple, liquid readings from the image. In essence, this highlights a point made on polysemia and humour in the introduction and reiterated in Chapter Five, and suggests that there may not be a winner, or a semantic outcome, in debates about the serious meaning of signs in a humorous frame. The criteria for judging meaning are, paradoxically, fundamentally different but inherently connected. Usual ideological signs may, of course, have the ability to be read in a variety of ways, but they do not necessarily contain the rhetorical/linguistic 'smoke and mirrors' produced by humour.

Briefly explained, the events that followed the publication of the cartoons included a series of protests from Danish Muslims, subsequent reprinting of the cartoons in over fifty countries and the escalation of protest, and of increasingly violent protest in some Muslim countries (Butler, 2006). The original cartoons were published with an article

by the *Jylland-Posten* culture editor Flemming Rose. This discussed freedom of speech and self-censorship, and explained how the Danish writer Kåre Bluitgen had difficulty finding an illustrator to draw Muhammad for a children's book. The article also reported 'that a local comedian said he didn't dare make fun of the Koran' (Whittam Smith, 2006). The controversy was specifically escalated by a delegation of Danish Imams touring the Middle East and lobbying governments there (Hansen, 2006a, O'Leary, 2006). This impacted on Denmark with the closure of a number of Arab embassies and a consumer boycott of Danish products in the Middle East.

More widely, reaction included government organised rioting in some Muslim countries, which resulted in a number of deaths (Butler, 2006). The organisation of the Islamic Conference and Arab League also requested the United Nations enact sanctions against Denmark and introduce blasphemy laws. The Danish lobbyists had presented a dossier in the Middle East entitled 'Dossier about championing the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him' (Hansen, 2006a: 9), which included the twelve cartoons and, it was reported, 'three additional cartoons of unknown origin: one shows Mohamed with a pig's snout, one shows the Prophet as a dangerous paedophile and the third shows a Muslim at prayer being buggered by a dog' (Lawson, 2006). It was later uncovered that the image containing the pig's snout was in fact a contestant at a French, not Danish, pig-squealing contest and had nothing to do with insulting Islam (Hansen, 2006a: 9). The dossier also included 'pictures from another Danish newspaper, anti-Muslim hate mail, a televised interview with Dutch member of parliament Ms. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who received the Freedom Prize from the Danish Liberal Party' (ibid: 9). Despite the eclectic contents of the dossier, most protestations and subsequent commentary have concentrated on the twelve cartoons, although it is unlikely that the cartoons would have caused as much outrage without the additional material. The cartoons are shown in Appendix Two, as they originally appeared in *Jyllands-Posten.*

As can be seen in Appendix Two, the twelve cartoons are all very different and could only be argued to be *equally* offensive, blasphemous, racist or Islamophobic by the most rigid of sensibilities. So, for example, the third cartoon down on the right simply shows Muhammed with a stick, walking through a desert. The cartoon in the bottom left-hand corner is benign towards all versions of Islam that understand irony. As Hansen explains, '[o]ne was a subtle attack on the paper itself: in it, Muhammed is not the Prophet but rather a young boy, a second generation migrant. He points to the chalkboard script: "The editorial team of *Jyllands-Posten* is a bunch of reactionary provocateurs"' (Hansen, 2006a: 8). Similarly, the drawing in the top left-hand corner is

of Kåre Bluitgen in a turban, holding a stick figure of Muhammad, as an orange inscribed with 'publicity stunt' falls into the turban. As one report explained, '[t]he proverb "an orange in the turban" is a Danish expression meaning "stroke of luck": here, the added publicity for the book' (Anon, 2006). It is, therefore, fairly implausible to argue that three of the twelve cartoons are at all offensive. They are, however, not all equally benign. The two most offensive cartoons are pictured below:

Figure 1. Muhammed: Kurt Westergaard
(Newspaperindex.com, 2005a)

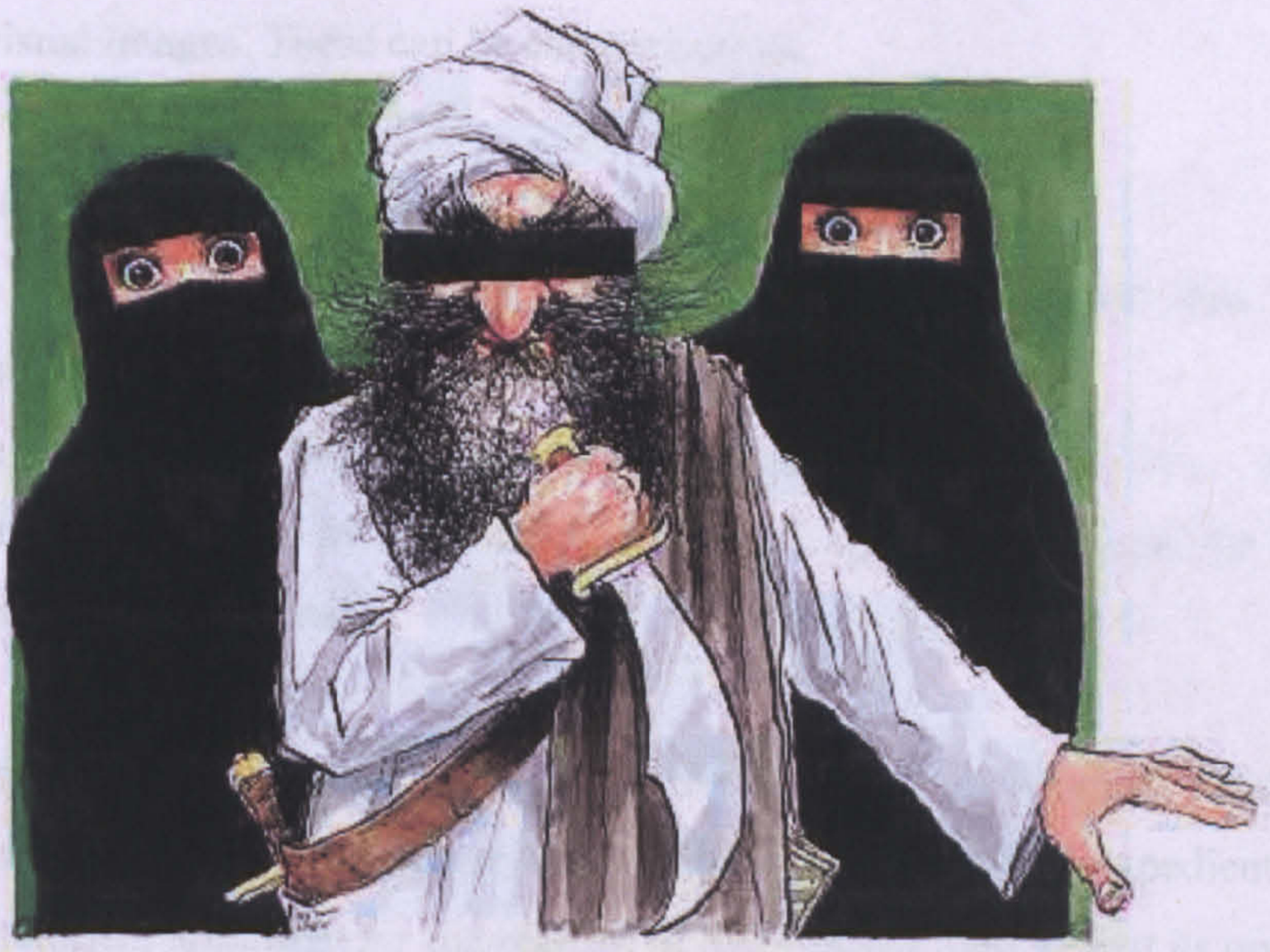

Figure 2. Prophet Muhammed. By: Rasmus Sand HÃ¸yer
(Newspaperindex.com, 2005b)

Berger highlights that 'it is much easier to ridicule someone, to make allusions about someone's transgressions and crimes, and to express contempt and loathing for someone visually by using caricature than it is in prose' (1995a: 144). These cartoons, the first showing a sketch of Muhammad with a bomb in his turban, the second showing Muhammad with his eyes blacked out, holding a sword (with two women behind him wearing burkhas that only allow their eyes to be seen) are generally considered to be the most offensive of the group. They are what might be called successful satirical caricatures.

Importantly, each of these cartoons is necessarily constructed with a comic incongruity, or with a contrast. In the intended reading, the first juxtaposes an image of Muhammad with the image of a terrorist bomb, and creates an incongruity or contrast because, of course, Muhammad was not a terrorist. The intended reading of the second cartoon plays on the prohibition of depicting Muhammad by showing him with his identity obscured. The mark of the censor on Muhammad's face becomes the focus of the humorous incongruity, in contrast to the women behind who have everything but their eyes obscured. This forms a visual opposition or incongruity that mocks the prohibition of depicting Muhammad and the concept of women wearing burkhas. These intended meanings are not always read and thus, as I explain, various reactions emerge, creating the liquidity of the images.

Descriptions of the two cartoons (and also by proxy, but falsely, all twelve) allow them several meanings, which can coexist because of the incongruity or ambiguity of each of the visual images. These can be categorised as:

1) The cartoons are a criticism of Islamic fundamentalism.
2) The cartoons are blasphemous because they depict Muhammad, thus insulting to Muslims and an attack on Muslims.
3) The cartoons are suggesting Muhammad is a terrorist, and thus, infer that Muslims are terrorists by association. In presenting this stereotype, the cartoons are Islamophobic and racist.

Most reactions to the cartoons see one reading and develop it as the most valid, or will see one as most offensive. Some see one as the most politically expedient and so construct a rhetorical argument *for* the realism of that reading and *against* its opponents. Such accounts do not read the cartoons as signs that exist in a specific semiotic 'frame'. Most do not consider issues of polysemia in relation to any particular reading of the

cartoons presented. They also inflict erasure on each other. This is what I call the liquid aspect of the cartoons controversy, or its postmodern dimension.

The first reading, a criticism of Islamic fundamentalism, is developed in the comments of the cartoonist of the turban/bomb cartoon, and by Flemming Rose. In the intended meaning, the cartoonist of the bomb/turban cartoon gives this explanation:

> The cartoon is not about Islam as a whole, but the part that apparently can inspire violence, terrorism, death and destruction. And thereby the fundamentalist part of Islam. I wanted to demonstrate that terrorists get their spiritual ammunition from Islam. There are interpretations of it that are incorrect. The general impression among Muslims is that it is about Islam as a whole. It is not. (Anon, 2006)

The cartoonist insists that the bomb/turban cartoon should not be read as racist and Islamophobic. In line with this, but with a slightly less specific focus, the twelve cartoons surround an article on self-censorship and freedom of speech. The comments of Flemming Rose illuminate the sentiment of the article and express the close-by reading:

> The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. (Rose, 2005)

Much has been made of the conservative politics of *Jyllands-Posten* (Modood, 2006a, 2006b; Bleich, 2006; Carens, 2006) and it seems obvious that the cartoons were intended to provoke a reaction from some Muslims at some level, and to offend their religious sensibilities. While conservative journalists have equal rights of expression, of course, the comments of Flemming Rose do paint a rather stereotypical image of Muslims in Europe, although Rose is careful to only accuse 'some Muslims'. As a conservative newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten* may have seen the exercise as a worthwhile task, for the greater good as they see it.

At no point in this thesis has the argument been made in favour of censoring any of the humour presented. Censoring humour would likely prove self-defeating and simply encourage increasingly coded forms of racist expression, and where racism is debated or ambiguous, might lead to a subtle authoritarianism. Likewise, discussions of censure in the debates that followed seemed to miss the point of the initial article on self-censorship (e.g. Modood, 2006a, 2006b). Furthermore, the structural ambiguity of humour prevents a comparison with hate speech (c.f. Bleich, 2006). Humour is a linguistic frame that differs from serious communication and no argument has

convincingly suggested that it should be censored on the grounds of it being *intended* to generate particular, specific, *serious* reactions. Despite this, humour does support racism, and it *is* possible to outline the rhetorical potential of such images, and to argue that humour is often more than 'just humour'. Importantly, the 'seriousness' of humour is such that its rhetorical effects are often more pointed because they are ambiguous and thus impossible to place inside of categories such as hate speech. Returning to the cartoons, the intended meaning gives no basis on which to accuse anyone of hate speech, and as incongruities encourage ambiguous reading, mapping, rather than accusation, is probably the most productive method of analysis.

Viewing the Cartoons as Offensive

Well outside of the intended reading, but paradoxically close-by, are the second and third readings:

> 2) The cartoons are blasphemous because they depict Muhammad, thus insulting to Muslims and an attack on Muslims.
> 3) The cartoons are suggesting Muhammad is a terrorist, and thus, infer that Muslims are terrorists by association. In presenting this stereotype, the cartoons are Islamophobic and racist.

I will now discuss, in turn, the veracity of each of these.

The 'blasphemous reading', the idea that the cartoons are an insult to Islam, appears in both direct protest and commentary. In outlining it, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown offers a description of the outrage caused by the cartoons: 'Flemming Rose... sought out controversial cartoonists to create caricatures of the Prophet Mohamed, not because they had something bold and compelling to say, but simply to enrage, like bullfighters goading a bull' (Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, 2006). Hansen explains how in October 2005, 'Muslim organisations in Denmark filed a complaint against the paper, claiming the publication constituted blasphemy under a rarely invoked section of the Danish criminal code' (2006a: 9). The blasphemous reading also gained purchase in Muslim countries where the dossier was publicised and unrest provoked. An example is reported by Katherine Butler: 'the sense of outrage at what is being depicted as an orchestrated Western assault on Muslim sensibilities, appears to cut across Pakistani society' (Butler, 2006). She adds 'Major General Shaukat Sultan Khan, the President's

spokesman, said the "blasphemous sketches" could be "detrimental to world peace... Moderate or non-practising Muslims are as one on this. It is like shoving pork down our throat"' (ibid). These extracts highlight one reading of the cartoons, as they develop as a co-agitator of both anti-western prejudice and offence at blasphemy.

There are differences of interpretation inside the group of readings loosely perceived as accounts of blasphemy. Some examples see the cartoons as a comment on the state of civilised society. These argue that because the cartoons show a lack of respect towards the faith of Muslims they are not reflective of ideal discourse in a civilised society. One letter to *The Independent* argues that, '[r]espect for other faiths is the basis of civilised society, particularly when we are living in an increasingly multi-faith and multi-cultural world where peace and harmony can only be achieved through understanding the sensitivities of others' (Malik, 2006). On the other hand, some expressions of this reading develop a vitriolic tone. For example, Robert Fisk reports how,

> The Islamic Army in Iraq, one of the main insurgent groups, made a blood-curdling call yesterday for violence against citizens of countries where caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed had been published. "We swear to God, if we catch one of their citizens in Iraq, we will cut him to pieces, to take revenge for Prophet," it said in an unverified internet statement. [sic] (Fisk, 2006)

While *The Islamic Army in Iraq* is not necessarily a fundamentalist organisation, it is a violent one, and this reaction to the cartoons, and other threats of violence, represent a response that specifically justifies the intended meaning, and exemplifies the stated purpose of the exercise. Many commentators see religion, religious fundamentalism and violent behaviour as fair game for satire. For example, Hansen argues that '[i]n liberal democratic society, religion is, like it or not, a fair target for criticism, satire and, fortunately or unfortunately, mockery and ridicule' (2006a: 12). He adds: '[p]ortraying the Prophet may be prohibited for Muslims, but it is not and cannot be for anyone else' (ibid: 15).

Of course, many would see it as a retrograde and authoritarian act to reinstate blasphemy as a serious offence, and I agree. As such, other grounds of complaint are called upon to render criticism at the cartoons. The dominant sociological critique of the cartoons develops the argument that they are culturally racist and/or an example of Islamophobia. The culturally racist reading is not one that is widely articulated in the media; in fact, it *is* an important point that most protests against the cartoons *do not* say that the cartoons are racist. This idea emerges in sociological accounts and is specifically dependent on the concept of Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism. One

initial problem with this line of argument is that it forms an example of sociological mistranslation: the application of ill-fitting sociological categories to social discourse that expresses quite different terms and concepts. So, for example, Hansen, in a survey of 113 newspaper articles, found that '[o]f those who took a position, 58 (43%) argued that the cartoons were offensive to Islam, while seven (5%) said they were both offensive to Islam and racist' (Hansen, 2006b: 49). Racism does not, therefore, appear from the outset to be the major cause of complaint. I briefly outline definitions of Islamophobia, give a critique of the concept, before offering my opinion on the usefulness of Islamophobia for an analysis of the cartoons.

In Islamophobia it is the religion of the Muslim as 'other' that becomes the dominant cultural signifier to which prejudicial attitudes are attached. As Modood outlines, 'religion can be the basis of racialisation as long as the religion of a group can be linked to physical ancestry and descent' (2005a: 11). Islamophobia is outlined by the Runnymede Trust (1997) in a ten-point guideline that distinguishes between open and closed views of Islam and Muslims (1997: 5). Islamophobia 'refers to unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs' (ibid: 4), and is always a closed, monolithic characterisation of Islam. Goldberg also describes how Muslims have historically signified the 'other':

> In Elizabethan England, 'the Moor' characterized the mix of religion, godless members of the 'sect of Mahomet', and North African blackness... By the Enlightenment racial hierarchization of national character, Immanuel Kant could wedge 'the Arab', 'possessed of an inflamed imagination, 'between the basest of (Southern) Europeans and the Far East, but significantly above "the Negroes of Africa". (Goldberg, 2006: 344)

Goldberg describes how nineteenth century colonial ideology racialized Muslims, by suggesting they became 'the quintessential outsider, ordinarily strange in ways, habits, and ability to self-govern, aggressive, emotional, and conniving in contrast with the European's urbanity, rationality, and spirituality' (ibid: 344-5). Incompatibility with European culture is regularly cited as a characteristic of Islam by Islamophobes (The Runnymede Trust, 1997: 5; see also Balibar, 1991: 24).

Unfortunately for the coherence of this reading of the cartoons controversy, most definitions of Islamophobia are rather light and remain theoretically undeveloped or inconsistent. Of course, anti-Muslim and anti-Asian racism exists, and in Chapter Four I

documented a number of examples of culturally racist jokes from British comedians that focus almost exclusively on British Asians (and post 9/11, Muslims particularly). Despite this, there are aspects to the concepts of Islamophobia outlined above that are undeveloped and fail to distinguish between racism and criticism of Islamic societies or Islam. Take, for example, point five of the Runnymede Trust's definition of closed views of Islam: 'Islam [is] seen as inferior to the West - barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist' (1997: 5). This is contrasted with an open view: 'Islam is seen as distinctly different, but not deficient, and equally worthy of respect' (ibid). Such criteria would, for example, leave Johann Hari's description of 'misogynistic cultural practices that demand woman cover their hair and - in extremis - their faces while men proudly display theirs' (Hari, 2006c) as being open to charges of Islamophobia and racism. It could also be argued that to highlight such a negative example is suspicious, or a part of some sort of pervasive cultural discourse of Islamophobia. These criteria of judgement are, in my view, inadequate for distinguishing racism from cultural criticism.

Generally, the distinctions between the Runnymede Trust's open and closed views of Islam are not ideal. As observed in Chapter Four, to describe cultural racism as new or more sophisticated is to describe it as increasingly polysemic. This is not reflected in the definition of a closed/racist view of Islam. For example, it would be quite elementary for racists to adopt the language of an open view of Islam to avoid criticism, yet still produce racist meaning. Such coding exercises *are* attempted in other examples of cultural racism yet *do not* appear in the Trust's considerations. Closed definitions could therefore ignore more sophisticated expressions of anti-Muslim racism. The Runnymede Trust report also devotes some attention to newspaper cartoons, where they argue, 'closed views of Islam are seen with particularly stark clarity in cartoons. For in order to make their point, cartoonists simplify' (1997: 21). They add that, '[t]hey are arguably all the more insidious for being 'funny', not to be taken too seriously - many an honest and offensive word is spoken in jest' (ibid). Their analysis does not examine the incongruity of humour generally, or any specific cartoons, and the effect of this incongruity. It is, therefore, poor humour analysis. The important point is not that any of the cartoons reproduced by the Runnymede Trust, or printed by *Jyllands-Posten,* literally exemplify the ten points of a closed view of Islam because they simplify or caricature. It is that they allow, because of their incongruity, for Islamophobia to be *implied* in readings of the cartoons. Paradoxically, this implication fails to allow for clear or serious racist intent to be proven. They are, therefore, anything but a closed, monolithic, simplified discourse.

Returning to the cartoons controversy, the idea that the cartoons stereotype Muslims or the idea of cultural racism appears in many press comments (although importantly, *not* articulated as such). One in *The Independent* expresses this: 'As there is no suggestion in history that he was a terrorist, the figure is clearly a proxy for all Muslims' (Shamsad, 2006). Another suggests '[t]hese people have deliberately stirred up agitation against the millions of ordinary and decent Muslims throughout the world by denigrating and ridiculing their Prophet and their faith' (Iqbal, 2006). A final example argues:

> To imply that his teachings legitimate terrorist activities is in itself a deliberate act of incitement to hatred. The purpose behind the publication and re-publication of the cartoons was deliberate provocation, based on a belief that Muslims are fair targets for any kind of insults. (Hasan, 2006)

The idea that the cartoons represent a *deliberate* act of provocation, that they are *clearly a proxy* for all Muslims, that this is the intended and only meaning, is semantically impossible to sustain. It is clearly one reading, but not the only one. Importantly, the intended reading of the bomb/turban cartoon presents an incongruity that does not suggest this. The two elements of the incongruity or the two premises are 1) the Prophet Muhammad and 2) the bomb, which are put together to form a contrast. They do not belong together - they are incongruous - because Muhammad was not a terrorist. Following the intended reading, it thus highlights a point about the way in which Islamic fundamentalism should be incongruous with Islam more readily than they suggest all Muslims are terrorists. This can be contrasted with a great number of the earlier jokes in the thesis, where stereotypes are attached to races through humour in ways that support the stereotype, rather than highlight its incongruity, by presenting a stereotype as a major premise before supporting it or another in the minor premise. The second cartoon focused on in this chapter develops a visual incongruity through tropes of comparison or opposition (Berger, 1995a: 54-5) by positioning the censors mark on Muhammad (who also holds a sword) and contrasting it with two women wearing burkhas. This is seen to ridicule the prohibition of depicting Muhammad, the concept of women wearing burkhas and the notion that Islam is violent. This could more readily be argued to be racist because of these elements, but again the image is ambiguous because it could be read in three ways, as the ridicule of specific religious practice, of Muslims as a racialized group (thus as racist ridicule), or of Islamic fundamentalism. With only reference to the image these readings remain ambiguous.

The second point in the previous quote, on the republication of the cartoons, is neatly addressed by Charles Turner:

> As a sociologist ... I cannot help feeling that, had the self-appointed leaders of the Muslim world read Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (fat chance, I know) then the fuss about the cartoons in *France Soir* and *Die Welt* at least could have been avoided. As Goffman would have pointed out, while a caricature of the Prophet published in a far-right newspaper is a provocation, the same caricature reproduced in a French or German newspaper as part of an article about the controversy which surrounded that caricature is an illustration, just as the same caricature presented at a blasphemy trial would be evidence. (Turner, 2006)

In acknowledging that the cartoons have a certain polysemic element, that the reading is altered in their context of reproduction, Turner defines the meaning or frame through its situational logic. For Turner, the reading of the significance of the cartoons, and the degree of directness of responsibility for whatever the content of the cartoons is supposed to be, is governed by the site of reproduction, or at least it should be. However, the particular relation of the audience characteristics and the reading of the incongruity of the cartoon images short circuits this logic, as protest was evident against the later reproductions. So, for example, for Amir Cheema, who admitted to the attempted murder of the *Die Welt* editor for reprinting the cartoons, the 'frame' of incongruity served to override the 'frame' of contextual interpretation.

Continuing with the racist reading, a number of sociological accounts have developed it. Modood (2006a) suggests:

> They are all unfriendly to Islam and Muslims and the most notorious implicate the prophet with terrorism. If the message was meant to be that non-Muslims have the right to draw Mohammed, it has come out very differently: that the prophet of Islam was a terrorist (2006a: 1).

I have shown that not all of the cartoons are unfriendly to Islam. Modood's reading concentrates on the bomb/turban cartoon, giving a monosemic interpretation of it. While he later retracts this comment, suggesting that the cartoons are 'a mixed bag' (2006b: 54), the two violent depictions remain racist and 'in the category of the kind of images that ought to be banned' (ibid). The logic of reading the cartoons as culturally racist follows:

> the cartoons are not just about one individual but about Muslims *per se* - just as a cartoon portraying Moses as a crooked financier would not be about one man but a comment on Jews. And just as the latter would be racist, so are the cartoons in question. (2006a: 1. Original emphasis)

Many commentators present analogies between the Muhammad cartoons and various examples of anti-Semitism or anti-Semitic cartoons that highlight that religious groups *can* be racialized but loses its power as argumentation if taken too far. Modood's example does highlight that to see Islam and terrorism as inherently connected *is* a cultural stereotype and thus culturally racist but it *does not* prove that the 'Muslim terrorist' is socially and historically entrenched in the same way as the 'rich crooked Jew'. The analogy rhetorically draws on anti-Semitism for support and invokes the image of pre-second world war anti-Semitic stereotyping. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of this comparison is the implicit assertion that European anti-Muslim racism has, in recent history, impacted on Muslims in the same way that anti-Semitism impacted on Jews. Moreover, the analogy also erases the reality of European Islamic fundamentalism, which is, in my view, a legitimate target for satire. Modood goes on to infer the intention of the cartoonist and attempts to connect the culturally racist reading with the intended meaning: 'If the intention of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* was not to cause offence, there clearly was a purpose of trying to achieve some kind of victory over Muslims, to bring Muslims into line' (ibid). On this he adds:

> The Danish editor cannot plead ignorance of what the effects on Muslims would be, for the whole exercise was premised on the view that a collective effort involving twelve cartoonists was necessary to withstand Muslim opposition. As for the republication of the cartoons across continental Europe, this was deliberately done to teach Muslims a lesson. (ibid: 2)

This highlights perfectly the constant erasure that the liquid meanings of the cartoons undergo. Modood's interpretation of the republication of the cartoons clearly differs from that of Turner's. Motives for republication can range from simple reportage, defence of freedom of speech, or Islamophobia. All are equally arguable and relatively convincing.

Sardar (2006) follows a similar logic and argues that a representation of Muhammad as a terrorist implicates all Muslims:

> The outrage is that the Prophet is represented as a terrorist with the clear implication that he preaches a violent creed and that all his followers are intrinsically violent. This is painting Islam and every Muslim in the conclusive colours of absolute darkness (Sardar, 2006).

He also states that it is 'a practical demonstration of President Bush's diktat that you are either with us or against us - accept what we do and join civilisation; object and be categorised as barbarians' (ibid) and adds that '[t]his is the same choice Europe gave

the Jews in 1920s and 30s... They [Muslims] are being demonised with exactly the same vehemence... In other words, Muslims are being set up for the next holocaust' (ibid). Here, the anti-Semitic analogy appears again as the plight of early twentieth century Jews is connected to the cartoon controversy.

There are further examples of the analogy. Returning to Modood, he argues that '[t]he suggestion that Muslims are not the subject of racism because they are a religious group is nonsense when one considers that the victimization of another religious group, the Jews, is paradigmatic of many peoples' understanding of racism' (Modood, 2006a: 6). Bleich adds that 'Muslims are being constructed as the newest ethno-racial outsiders in Europe' (Bleich, 2006: 17), and Carens speculates that,

> If a major German newspaper had published an anti-Semitic cartoon in the 1950s, would this have warranted (or received) only the same level of public criticism that it would have received anywhere else in Europe or North America at the time?
>
> Similarly, the specific circumstances of Danish Muslims do and should matter to our reactions. (2006: 40)

Of course, the idea that Muslims are racialized is correct, and there is clear evidence of this, and they do suffer racism. Jews were clearly racialized by the Nazis in twentieth century Europe and others before this, in racist and political ideology, and in science. Whether this has happened or is happening to Muslims in the same way is unlikely. Specifically though, it is even more difficult to sustain that the only reading of the cartoons is to racialize Muslims. Muslims at present suffer from a combination of two themes or types of racism. First, they suffer a general immigrational racism that affects many migrants or second generation migrants in Europe, and second, they suffer a prejudice that sees Muslims as a threat to the nation, which, in the British case, is similar to that projected onto the Irish, Argentineans and Germans at various points in the last century, and is racially based, but varies in specificity. This second element is completely dependent on political circumstances and likely to subside once Islamic fundamentalism subsides too. This is not comparable to pre-second world war anti-Semitism and almost certainly began on September 11th 2001. Hansen argues, rightly, that 'the Jews of Europe suffered a level of hatred, discrimination, and suffering that makes anything Muslims in the EU are currently experiencing seem like comic relief' (2006b: 46), or at least, in this instance, satirical representation. He adds that 'an anti-Islamic cartoon cannot and will not have the same impact as an anti-Semitic one did before the war' (ibid). If the cartoons racialize then, it is a different and weaker form, and draws primarily on the second element of anti-Muslim racism.

Hansen adds on the specific issue of racialization that '[t]he question is open to interpretation, but none of the cartoons portrayed stereotypically looking Muslims; they were not, as many claimed, the equivalent of *der Sturmer's* hooked nose, bearded Jew reaching into a pot of gold' (Hansen, 2006a: 12, see also Hansen, 2006b: 48 for examples of such anti-Semitic cartoons). So, while Modood (2006b) counters that racialization does not depend only on phenotypical representation, and that seeing Muslims as terrorists would be an instance of cultural racialization, the key issue is not that anti-Muslim racism does not exist, it is that it is ambiguous whether or not the intention of the cartoonists was motivated by racism (that they wished to depict all Muslims) and it is even more unclear that the reading of the cartoons by the majority of non-Muslim Europeans provokes racism. What *is* clear is that many Muslims find the cartoons to be blasphemous - this is not the same thing.

That said, an anti-Muslim racist reading of the cartoons *has* been developed by the British National Party, who use it for culturally racist ambivalence resolution. In this case the cartoons are used as a signifier of all Muslims, are situated as a way of expressing proteophobia and parallel the ambivalences outlined in Chapter Four. Robert Verkaik reports that, '[t]he British National Party has published some of the cartoons on its website. "British newspapers have united in their cowardice by refusing to carry the cartoons which have caused a storm of protest and anger amongst the Muslim world", read the accompanying statement' (Verkaik, 2006). The BNP was reported to have used one of the cartoons in the May 2006 local authority elections, as Andrew Grice writes that the BNP 'will include in its campaign material one of the cartoons which sparked outrage among Muslims across the world, showing the Prophet Mohamed with a bomb in his turban' (Grice, 2006). Such uses simply confirm the ambiguity of the images and the necessary rigidity of the reader who can 'overcome' this. In this case the cartoons are being used to say 'look! Muslims really are all terrorists, the cartoons say so!' Here, the problem is with the reader. The power of the cartoons, like any successful satire, lies in the distortions created. There is no literal sense in saying that every Muslim is a terrorist. In any rational dialogue it would be refuted instantly. In the racist reading of the cartoons this is not required to be true, yet it develops a rhetorical effect as racist truth.

So, in concluding this section, we can argue that the cartoons generate a form of liquid racism. This is a form that is diluted to an extent that it requires the addition and subsequent negation of the other readings in order to sustain its persuasiveness. Overall though, while it is possible that the cartoonists may have been racist, and some viewers

of the cartoons certainly are racist, the actions of Danish lobbyists, the reaction of particular Muslim protesters, calls for censorship, the awakening of blasphemy and the obvious centrality of religious offence, coupled with the absence of any obvious cases of incitement of hatred or violence *towards* Muslims, suggests that anti-Muslim racism is not the only problematic aspect of expression in this case. This will be returned to at the end of the chapter.

Viewing the Cartoons as Satire

This section briefly outlines the idea that the cartoons make a satirical comment by, first, giving a concept of satire, explaining further the comments the cartoons make, and discussing whether their aim hits a justified target.

In defining satire, Stott outlines that it 'aims to denounce folly and vice and urge ethical and political reform through the subjection of ideas to humorous analysis' (2005: 109). This presents the idea that humour is able to give a particular type of 'analysis' of serious events. This might represent the partisan ridicule of a particular position and the connected rhetorical strengthening of ideas linked to this, as ethics are rarely objective. It also points to the specific alienation of the object of humour, as outlined in Chapter One. Griffin adds a similar comment: 'satire works like the preacher-rhetorician to persuade his audience to virtue' (1994: 37). I have explained that the specific targets of the cartoons are ambiguous. Contrary to this, for example, Sardar (2006) argues '[a] cartoon is a satiric device. Satire holds a mirror to the powerful, speaking truth to power. But European Muslims can hardly be described as powerful' (2006: 1). This firmly sees the cartoons through the culturally racist lens, but if one takes the target to be Islamic fundamentalism, then they do speak truth to power mongers, and do make an ethical comment. It seems then, that the targets of the cartoons are multiple, and thus, so are the ethical impacts.

It is not a new phenomenon for satire to be offensive to its target. For example, Stott explains that in Aristophanes' comedy '[a]buse that we would now consider libellous was a fundamental part of comedy' (2005: 106). Following this trend of offensiveness, Greek satire became influential in the eighteenth century as 'English authors rediscovered satirical models as a powerful form of social commentary' (ibid: 112). Many of the examples in Gatrell's *City of Laughter* (2006) clearly show the insulting nature of London's eighteenth century satire. In satire it is the stretching of incongruity

that encourages the ridiculous meaning. Hence, satire is not supposed to be nice, gentlemanly or civil, and has frequently encouraged the authoritarian response of reaching for the censors mark:

> In 1737, the fear of ridicule prompted Sir Robert Walpole to introduce the Licensing Act censoring the theatre and its satirical attacks on his government. Hitler "was so wary of the dangers of humour in the Third Reich that he had special "joke courts" set up for, among other things, punishing people who named their dogs and horses "Adolph" (Morreall, 1983: 102)... In Soviet Russia it was strictly forbidden to publish satire that criticised the party or its officials - a crime punishable by imprisonment in labour camps. In the United States during the 1950s, the investigations of Senator Joseph McCarthy's House committee on Un-American Activities, established to root out communist sympathizers and treasonous plots at home, drove humorists underground for fear of blacklisting or incarceration. (Stott, 2005: 105)

Returning specifically to the Prophet Muhammad cartoons, on the satirical side of the coin (or incongruity) is the liberal secular reading and defence of freedom of speech, which is also a defence of satire. The intended meanings of the cartoons, summarised as a comment on Islamic fundamentalism and a defence of freedom of speech in reaction to self-censorship, were, in the proceeding debates, championed by a number of writers and journalists. Some of these do acknowledge that the cartoons may be genuinely offensive to Muslims, but very few touch on the issue of racism in any depth. Johann Hari exemplifies this position:

> Surely the only position for a liberal and a democrat to take is to rally to the side of the cartoonists?... free speech is not freedom to be nice. It is freedom to be offensive, foolish or even racist, or it is nothing. (Hari. 2006a)

As his argument develops, the defence becomes more determined:

> A poisonous cliché sprang up: that this is a fight between "Liberal fundamentalists" and Islamic fundamentalists, two equally extreme sides that reasonable people should reject. Do these people really believe there is a moral equivalence between a system of free speech that protects everyone, Muslims included, and a superstitious taboo that proposes to erect a wall around one man and silence all criticism of him? (ibid)

The liberal secular reading develops from the intended meaning. While not specifically concerned with an interpretation of the cartoons, it becomes a defence of principle that exists externally of the meanings that are created by the cartoons. The second quote emphasises this, as Hari begins to give normative judgement on the wider arguments. Later he comments on the London demonstration against the cartoons:

> This year, London has seen more than one mass rally in favour of censorship. The enemies of free speech recur throughout the ages, appalled by Michelangelo, Galileo, DH Lawrence... and today, it is cartoon depictions of Mohamed that stoke their rage. Tomorrow it will be something else, perhaps something you love. (Hari, 2006b)

This view is supported in many commentaries, for example, another cartoonist, Dave Brown, suggests that '[y]ou have to respect the right of people to express beliefs. I think some people's beliefs are ludicrous, and I need to be able to point fun, and ridicule them when it is warranted. (Brown, 2006). Likewise, Greg Dyke offers a viewpoint on why the British press had not reproduced the cartoons, through recounting comments made by Salman Rushdie:

> He told us that our tolerant liberal society which we had fought to establish over centuries, was in danger of being destroyed from within because that very tolerance meant we tolerated people who didn't share those same values and, as a result, they would undermine them. I have a horrible feeling that this is what is happening today. (Dyke, 2006)

These debates assert the defence of a principle - freedom of speech. Being directly caught up in the unfolding discourse and characteristic of journalistic commentary, where opinion is paramount, there is little attempt to say anything about the way in which the debates have developed as a direct result of the semantic structure of the cartoons, thus they perpetuate the liquid aspects of the debates. Certainly the debates capture important points, my position and reasons for not censoring humour have already been outlined. I will now say a little more about postmodernity and fundamentalism, as the cartoons, and their incongruity, encourage a reaction to ambivalence that is postmodern in appearance. For this analysis we must return to Bauman.

Postmodernity and Fundamentalism

> There is, a specifically postmodern form of religion, born of the internal contradiction of postmodern life, of the specifically postmodern form in which the sufficiency of man and the banality of dreams to take human fate under human control are revealed. This form has come to be known under the English name of *fundamentalism*... (Bauman, 1997b: 182)

Throughout the chapter I have said that there is a postmodern tendency at work in the cartoons controversy, that the liquid readings of the cartoons specifically become racist when the position of the reader becomes more trenchant, or at a more extreme level,

more fundamentalist. This was evident in the BNP's use of the cartoons and in the violent reactions towards non-Muslim Europeans from some Muslims.

To reiterate, I highlighted the BNP's use of the cartoons as one that encourages racism, alongside this, there is also an ostensive display of anti-European hatred expressed in the violent protest surrounding the cartoons. For example, Hansen outlines that '[o]n 30 January, armed gunmen in the Gaza strip stormed the European Union office in Gaza, threatening to kidnap the workers unless the EU issued an official apology. Hamas's leaders demanded that Denmark punish the cartoonists and *Jyllands-Posten*' (2006a: 9). Further to this, in Europe there were also expressions of violent intent:

> Demonstrations were organised outside the Danish embassy in London, during which radical Islamists brandished placards stating: "Slay [also butcher/massacre/behead/ exterminate] those who insult Islam", "Free speech go to hell", Europe is the cancer and Islam is the cure", and "Europe will pay, your 9/11 is on its way" (ibid: 10).

An organiser at the London protest, Umran Javed, was later found guilty of inciting racial hatred. Shenai Raif reports that '[h]e was said to have shouted: 'Bomb, Bomb Demark, Bomb, bomb, USA' (Raif, 2007). Such expressions are much more monosemic than the cartoons and so far easier to gain conviction under race hate legislation. What is significant is the vitriol generated in these reactions are in response to a series of ambiguous satirical images. This is a fundamentalist reaction to postmodern ambivalence.

Bauman argues that fundamentalism, both religious and non-religious, is a tendency that is a specific product of postmodernity. He suggests,

> ... fundamentalism is the supreme (though radically simplified) embodiment of a tendency aided and abetted by the whole thrust of postmodern culture. One may conclude that religious fundamentalism is a legitimate child of postmodernity, born of its joys and torments, and heir to its achievements and worries alike. (1997b: 184).

We might ask specifically what are the tendencies of postmodern culture that Bauman believes fundamentalism embodies? Bauman, as was explained in Chapter Two, sees postmodernity as an era in which there is a notable and significant increase in the occurrence and experience of ambivalence, instability, liquidity, and the predictable anxiety that might be expected to result from this. This postmodern condition is also said to lead to an increase in individualism, both chosen and prescribed. Bauman argues

that '"Fundamentalism", *choosing* to hold fast to inherited and/or ascribed identity, is a natural and legitimate offspring of planet-wide enforced individualisation' (2005: 27). Fundamentalism is, therefore, a reaction to an ambivalent world and an attempted reordering of that world through its reinscription.[43] Following this rationale, fundamentalism has, for Bauman, an equivalent relationship with ambivalence as Fascism. Hence, he argues that '... religious fundamentalism belongs to a wider family of totalitarian or proto-totalitarian solutions offered to all those who find the burden of individual freedom excessive and unbearable' (1997b: 184), that it 'is an offer of an *alternative rationality*' (ibid: 185. Original emphasis). Moreover, this reverses the pattern found around the humour examined in Chapter Three, where it is the hatred of the 'other' that forms the impetus for joke creation, rather than hatred being expressed in the outrage to the created incongruity.

Returning to the Prophet Muhammad cartoons, the cartoons are an ambiguous and liquid form, and the incongruity central to their construction is responsible for the manufacture of this liquidity. They are, therefore, an article of culture that one might, quite fairly, be ambivalent about, especially when we are discussing the *serious* arguments of what they are really intended to mean, and what should be done with them. From this chapter, and from the wider findings of the thesis, the idea of an understanding of polysemia and racism, especially cultural racism, becomes evident and necessary. On the issue of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons and the reactions to them specifically, returning to Bauman, I use one of his generic comments to suggest that '[t]he problem is not how to dismiss the gravity of the questions, but how to find answers free from totalitarian genes' (1997b: 185).

Conclusion

In this final chapter I have highlighted the development of a different type of liquid racism, one that is still ambiguous and follows from the development of specifically trenchant and fixed socio-discursive positioning, but one that is specifically political and satirical. First, I outlined the background to the Prophet Muhammad cartoons controversy, before explaining how three of the images are not offensive. I then gave a

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[43] See also Springett (2003) for a commensurate psychoanalytic account of anxiety, ambivalence and the resulting discursive fixity in all religious fundamentalisms, and sociological accounts (Alam, 2007: 32, and Brighton, 2007: 13) of the reordering, reactive and monosemic characteristics of Islamic fundamentalism.

sketch of the two cartoons generally considered to be the most offensive. Following this, I outlined the intended reading of the cartoons before discussing how they come to be seen as offensive. This was then juxtaposed with a brief outline of the importance of the European tradition of satire and the arguments behind the liberal secular defence of freedom of speech. Finally we saw that some violent reactions to the cartoons (which are liquid and ambiguous images), follow the logic and characteristics of Bauman's description of fundamentalism. An important need of postmodernity is emphasised in the trenchant or fundamentalist reading of solid racism where there is, in reality, liquid racism, and that is a necessity for an increased reflexivity and self-analysis in the postmodern world, and for the understanding of the need for meaningful, collective identification and belonging.

Conclusion

In this concluding statement I rearticulate the central arguments of the thesis, present the relevance of this research for sociology and humour studies, and outline the wider applicability of the theory and method developed in the thesis. Such examples as are discussed in the thesis signal the interest, debate and moral outrage that racist and other forms of humour often provoke, and the media content and coverage devoted to it. These factors point towards the importance of the sociological reporting, explanation and analysis of humour and its rhetoric. Hopefully this thesis has gone some way towards helping to begin these tasks. While in the past most analysis has struggled to find stable ground on which to build a position, the development of sociological humour studies may help to remedy such failings.

The Relevance of this Research for Sociological Humour Studies

I will now reiterate the important observations from the thesis with a view to outlining their wider applicability. Chapter One outlined not a universal explanation of humour but an account that elicited significant developments for a typology of theoretical processes that help highlight the rhetorical processes of humour, and allow for a critical analysis of it. I explained how humour can redefine reality, co-agitate disparate discourses and create semantic alienation. All of these processes depend on humorous incongruity as a rhetorical device. Following this, I integrated these ideas into a three stage 'rhetorical analysis' of humorous texts. This considered discursive content, discursive connotation, and discursive/rhetorical structure. I also showed that humour can affect ambivalent social discourses. Chapter One provided a 'tool kit' of theoretical techniques that help explain the rhetoric of humour, this tool kit need not be specific to racist humour and could be used for the analysis of other forms.

Chapter Two took these observations and outlined the effect that humour is able to have on the ambivalence, incongruity, ambiguity and incoherence of racist ideology. I explained that ambivalence represents what Zygmunt Bauman calls the alter ego of language, the waste product that is inherent as the catalyst and the product of order-building systems. I signalled that these order-building processes draw on humour as a rhetorical device that consumes the ambiguous waste of signification. These claims

were central for the analysis presented in later chapters but, again, need not be limited to the study of racist humour.

In Chapter Three I began my analysis with the first specific case study or type of humour - embodied racist humour - principally but not exclusively drawn from US internet websites. Wieviorka's dual logic of racism was applied to racist humour to show how it depicts, first, the inclusion of the 'other' through inferiorization, and second, the exclusion of the 'other' through expulsion. I outlined non-stereotyped jokes that express the exclusionary logic (and proteophobia) through images of refuse categorisation and disposal. After this, I explained how the second logic, inferiorization, appears in racist dichotomies. Dichotomous stereotypes develop ambivalence because they are binary arrangements that provoke an 'outside'.

Chapter Four opened with an outline of cultural racism as a racism of cultural difference, but also one that can be specifically broken down into what are often more coherent elements, such as nationalism, xenophobia and immigrational prejudice. This case study of cultural racism in humour was drawn, in the main, from British stand-up comedy of the past thirty years, but specifically focuses on that which is still easily available and consumed by the general public. I outlined that cultural racism also expresses the dual logic of racism as exclusionary and inferiorizing. The rhetorical themes that appear in it are 1) a specific form of coded racism that appears in response to the increasing unacceptability of biological racism, 2) a negotiation of national territory that fixates on the maintenance, and fears the transgression of national boundaries that enforces the exclusionary logic of racism, and 3) an ambivalence of social identity that negotiates the competing categories of the 'other' as an alien and a neighbour, and focuses on the logic of inferiorization.

The next chapter of the thesis, Chapter Five, saw a movement away from the analysis of racism created by white comedians towards an analysis of the 'reversed discourse' of black and Asian comedians, which employ the same sign-systems and stereotypes as embodied and cultural racism but do so with a reversed semantic effect. The central point from the chapter relates to polysemia in humour, and from this, a consideration that reversal in humour is never automatically 'successful'. The chapter threw into doubt the very notion of 'success' in humour.

In Chapter Six the shift towards increased polysemia continued as I examined 'postmodern humour', which multiples the lack of fixity in humour and removes

authorial intention. Overall, the humour cannot attach itself to, or support, a serious discourse in the same non-contradictory way that other forms can, because it produces both racist and non-racist meanings simultaneously. None of the meanings dominate and so serious racism is not rhetorically impacted on as effectively through this type of comedy. Liquid racism allowed for a more complete description of these processes.

Chapter Seven saw a different type of liquid racism develop, one that is called 'postmodern satire', and one that has significant political implications not generated by the humour outlined in Chapter Six. I examine the case of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons as ambiguous and polysemic images that simultaneously express a clear satirical attack on Islamic fundamentalism *and* anti-Muslim racism. These readings have very different ethical interpretations and implications, and thus present the ethical complexity of evaluating the polysemicity of humorous incongruity.

A Way Forward

The approach I have developed in this thesis is effective because it combines linguistic models of incongruity analysis with critical interventions on the content of racist humour (c.f. the semantic script theory of Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994, 2001; and empirical collections by Davies, 1996, 1998a, 2002). This allows sociological humour studies to be viewed as critical theory. This is the specific originality of the thesis - the critical textual analysis of a discursive frame that does not follow the rules of the serious - but which has a number of implications for it.

Of course, this analysis is very important for both sociology and 'good' humour. Much sociology might wish to account for laughter and the humorous, and might want to present critical interventions. This cannot be a simplistic or ideological exercise because humour is not a simplistic linguistic frame. As was seen in Chapter Seven, on the Prophet Muhammad cartoons, accounts that remain in the ideological rather than analytic register ignore or erase polysemia, and are unconvincing as critical theory. One important implication from this thesis is that we might see the analysis of racist or offensive humour as a substitute for censoring it, as its rhetorical effects *can* be combated if they can be understood, providing arguments on *how* it works and *what* it does, rather than emotively charged, serious proclamations calling for its removal. Thus no reasons exist for why critical humour research programmes cannot flourish.

Overall, the thesis has outlined the rhetorical structure and potential effects of humour. The ideas drawn on are original in the form they are applied, and have been the victim of an intellectual amnesia - no longer forming a part of commonsense understandings in comparison to positive or exculpatory positions. I have demonstrated that the typologies, contents and structures of racist humour *can* be analysed from inside of serious sociological humour studies, that this can yield understandings of the multidimensional functional and rhetorical effects of racist humour. With the insight firmly established that jokes are rarely 'just jokes', that their rhetorical ability is a structural prerequisite, we can certainly see a new analytical avenue for sociological humour studies, and perhaps, in the long run, even for humour itself. We might even say that sociological humour studies can liberate humour, that observation of the rhetorical processes of humour and associated issues of polysemicity might even begin to push sociological humour studies into the sociological mainstream. This is something that would add freshness and subtlety to the discipline, as well as leading to a more sophisticated typology of humour. And so, in the future, we might be better equipped to appreciate that, in the words of Mark Twain, 'laughter without a tinge of philosophy is but a sneeze of humour. Genuine humour is replete with wisdom' (1992: 59).

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Appendix One

Berger's (1995a: 54-5) List of Forty-Five Humour Techniques.

Technique	*Category*	*Technique*	*Category*
1. Absurdity	Logic	34. Repetition, Pattern	Logic
2. Accident	Logic	36. Ridicule	Logic
3. Allusion	Language	35. Reversal	Logic
4. Analogy	Logic	37. Rigidity	Logic
5. Before/After	Identity	38. Sarcasm	Language
6. Bombast	Language	39. Satire	Language
7. Burlesque	Identity	40. Scale, Size	Identity
8. Caricature	Identity	41. Slapstick	Visual
9. Catalogue	Logic	42. Speed	Visual
10. Chase Scene	Visual	43. Stereotypes	Identity
11. Coincidence	Logic	44. Theme and Variation	Logic
12. Comparison	Logic	45. Unmasking	Identity
13. Definition	Language		
14. Disappointment	Logic		
15. Eccentricity	Identity		
16. Embarrassment	Identity		
17. Exaggeration	Language		
18. Exposure	Identity		
19. Facetiousness	Language		
20. Grotesque	Identity		
21. Ignorance	Logic		
22. Imitation	Identity		
23. Impersonation	Identity		
24. Infantilism	Language		
25. Insults	Language		
26. Irony	Language		
27. Literalness	Language		
28. Mimicry	Identity		
29. Mistakes	Logic		
30. Misunderstanding	Language		
31. Parody	Identity		
32. Puns, Wordplay	Language		
33. Repartee, Outwitting	Language		

Appendix Two

The twelve cartoons of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad as they appeared in *Jyllands-Posten* on 30th September 2005. The centre of the page features an article on self-censorship and freedom of speech.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image: JyllandsPosten_Muhammad_drawings.jpg, 2006).